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Recovering Frances Virginia and the Frances Virginia Tea Room: Transition Era Activism at the Intersections of Womanism, Feminism, and Home Economics, 1920-1962

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RECOVERING FRANCES VIRGINIA AND THE FRANCES VIRGINIA TEA ROOM:
TRANSITION ERA ACTIVISM AT THE INTERSECTIONS
OF WOMANISM, FEMINISM, AND HOME ECONOMICS, 1920-1962

by

MILDRED H. COLEMAN, CFCS

Under the Direction of Layli Maparyan

ABSTRACT

This work answers the question “Who was Frances Virginia?” by recovering the story of an Atlanta entrepreneur, Frances Virginia Wikle Whitaker, and her tea room foodservice business. It acknowledges “Frances Virginia,” as the public knew her; and focuses on her career as demonstrative of an under-theorized form of women’s activism. Her education and proclivity in the once all-female domain of home economics have important characteristics that are under-represented, and often misinterpreted, in today’s discourse. I use a womanist theoretical lens within a historical frame to examine her story as a home economist during the tea room movement of the U. S. feminist movement’s Transition Era, 1920s-1960s. Together, these elements illuminate the significance of Frances Virginia and her particular form of activism.

INDEX WORDS: Activism, Atlanta history, Biography, Business models, Dietetics, Dietitian, Family and consumer sciences, Feminism, Feminist waves, First Wave Feminism, Food, Foodways, Frances Virginia Tea Room, Frances Virginia Wikle Whitaker, Gender, History, Home economics, Human ecology, Southern culture, Southern women, Tea, Tea rooms, The Transition Era, Womanism, Women’s history

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Georgia State University

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my husband Tom, who suggested that I apply to graduate school at age 62.
He has supported me all the way.

It is also dedicated to:

My matrilineal family of Scots-Irish Southerners: Mary Martin,‡ who birthed Rebecca Martin Peden; who birthed Rebecca Peden Stennis; who birthed Mary A. Stennis Mc Kittrick;‡ who birthed Martha Mattie McKittrick Sprouse;‡ who birthed Mary Caroline Carrie Sprouse Coleman [Muzzy];*‡ who birthed Agnes Coleman New,*‡ Marjorie Casler Coleman Smith,* [who birthed Marjorie Caroline Smith Sherman*‡] and Ina Jean Coleman Huff;*‡ who birthed my sister, Mary Agnes Huff,*‡ and me, Mildred Caroline Huff Coleman;*‡ who birthed Carina Jean Coleman.*‡

My Pittsburgh-Italian mother-in-law: Michelena Peg Spada Coleman.

(These * have had collegiate education in domestic science/home economics/family sciences and/or teaching. These ‡ have been business or farm entrepreneurs.)

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Additional thanks go to the unnamed women and men who shared their Frances Virginia stories; those who helped me return to school after a 40-year absence and cheered me on: Pat Groves, Linda Kelley, Lydia Ruyle, Trisha Sinnott, Suzanne Carr, Maribeth Brannen, Jari Grimm; Feminist Spirituality goddesses; Johnny, Jimmy, Mary and Joe Huff; Sewing Club, Book Group; the supporting professors, classmates, Nicole, Tristan, Jim, Monica, the Writing Studio experts and staff at GSU and UGA; Vicki Coleman and Francisca VanDenBrink. I offer particular thanks to my outstanding thesis committee members.

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INTRODUCTION: WHO WAS FRANCES VIRGINIA?

To understand Frances Virginia as the image and model of a prototypical activist, we must see her within the historical context and environs of her lifetime, 1895-1962. A century ago, women had limited options for dining, careers and public leadership. However, Frances Virginia's tea room became her vehicle for social change. Our 21st century tea rooms are quite different from those of Frances Virginia's Roaring Twenties, so it may be difficult to imagine how a tea room could serve as a vehicle for social change. To make my case, I will offer three frameworks that contextualize Frances Virginia and her tea room business in light of her times: the transition era, the field of home economics and womanism.

By including case examples and illustrations within each framework, I will show how Frances Virginia was an innovator who also operated within her gendered culture. She did not work within an organized group like labor or clubwomen activists. Yet, she was not a lone activist. There were thousands of similar home economics-trained women who were working in tandem, following each other's models, yet acting in their own unique ways, developing their own programs as professional dietitians, home economics teachers, home demonstration agents and home economists operating as stay-at-home homemakers who volunteered in their churches and communities.

The frameworks I will use, plus the plethora of artifacts, records and living memories, add flesh and form to this multi-method case study,¹ which recovers Frances Virginia as an ex-

¹ The Appendices show photos of Frances Virginia, her tea room and menu, as well as additional key social and historical events that occurred during the transition era time period, to assist readers to remember current events and imagine women's life during Frances Virginia's time.

emplary model of women's activism and documents her tea room business as a significant mode of operation for social change. In the sections that follow, I draw from extensive archival research that encompasses newspapers, interviews, personal memorabilia, and occasionally, other kinds of published works, to paint a picture of Frances Virginia and her Atlanta tea room.

Biography of Frances Virginia Wikle Whitaker

Her story begins in Cartersville, Georgia, January 15, 1895. Frances Virginia Wikle Whitaker was born the fourth of five children of Mattie McElwain and Charles A. Wikle. They were white, comfortably upper-middle class, and active community participants. Frances Virginia was two years old when her family moved to Marietta, Georgia, where her father, a pharmacist, operated a drug store on the town square. Because of her father's health care profession, Frances Virginia would have been exposed at an early age to the latest concepts of disease, wellness, and medicines.²

It is important to note here that during the early 1900s until the 1970s, drug stores offered much more than hand crafted pharmaceuticals and home health care products. These establishments also functioned as eateries and were often referred to as drug store soda shoppes. They were outfitted with carbonation equipment and machines to make ice cream specialties as well as other refreshments and sandwiches. As a result, Frances Virginia would have experienced her father's drug store as a center of community sociability and hospitality.³ Frances Virginia's great-nieces say that Mrs. Wikle may have called the drug store's food service a tea room or had a tea room in a bookshop nearby. All of these factors would have influenced Frances Virginia's decision to enter the field of home economics as well as her early understanding of hospitality, service, and care.

² Sally Kemp Baker, personal interview, taped Oct. 2009

³ According to family members and owners, one of the earliest Frances Virginia Tea Room recipes was a soda fountain-style sundae made with warm, Chocolate Fudge Sauce served over ice cream or cake slices. Mildred Huff Coleman, *The South's Legendary Frances Virginia Tea Room Cookbook*, 25th Anniversary Edition ed. (Nashville, TN: Favorite Recipes Press, 2006; reprint, 6th printing in 2006), Margie Kemp Burleigh, personal interview, taped, Oct. 5 2009.

In 1913, Frances Virginia followed her two elder sisters, Hooper and Margaret, and began her higher education at Wesleyan Female College in Macon, Georgia. However, Wesleyan did not offer home economics at that time and, after a year, she transferred to the Georgia Normal and industrial College⁴ in Milledgeville, Georgia. She graduated in 1917 with a degree in Collegiate Industrial Home Economics. After completing her undergraduate studies, she took an additional summer course and began her career as a Home Economist in the fall. She spent a year in charge of the high school Domestic⁵ Science Department in Macon, Georgia.⁶

In August of 1918, the front page of her home town newspaper, *The Marietta Daily Journal*, described her as a "girl of earnest purpose and very unusual ability," who was moving to New York City to do graduate work in dietetics at the City Hospital on Blackwell's Island. According to other local papers, in 1919 she completed the dietetic internship and soon after began work as a hospital dietitian at Monmouth Memorial Hospital in Long Branch, New Jersey, and later, the Lenox Hill Hospital in New York. She returned to Atlanta in 1920, accepting a Grady Hospital dietetics position.⁷ By December 1922, she was Head Dietitian for Piedmont Sanatorium's first dietetics program, where she also assisted with Dr. James E. Paullin's groundbreaking diabetes research program, and supervised student dietitians.⁸ She was a single

⁴ This became the Georgia State College for Women and later, The Georgia College at Milledgeville. Now it is the Georgia College and State University.

⁵ Cynthia A Brandimarte, "To Make the Whole World Homelike: Gender Space and America's Tea Room Movement," *Winterthur Portfolio* 30, no. 1 Spring (1995).

⁶ "News About the City," *Cobb County Times*, Sept. 27 1917, 3. "News About the City."

⁷ "Miss Wikle to Be Dietitian," *Marietta Daily Journal*, Aug. 9 1918, 1.

"Social and Personal," *The Marietta Journal and Courier*, Sept. 20 1918, 3.

"News About the City: Miss Frances Wikle," *Cobb County Times*, Feb. 6 1919, 6.

"Personal Overflow: Miss Frances Wikle," *Marietta Daily Journal*, July 2 1920, 8.

⁸ Although family lore and newspapers mention that Frances Virginia had an earlier tea room in Florida, her first documented "Frances Virginia Tea Room" opened in Atlanta on July 21, 1927.⁸ - Ruth N. Henley, R. N., *Sanatorium to Medical Center: The History of Piedmont Hospital 1905-1985*, ed. Stewart R. III Oglesby (Amersand Studios, Inc., 1984), 39.

professional woman when she decided to become an Atlanta entrepreneur and welcomed customers to her food service business. Six months afterwards, she married Toxey Whitaker and two years later birthed her first son, Toxey, Jr. in 1929.⁹ In 1931, in the midst of The Great Depression and while mothering a toddler, she began lease negotiations to move into a much larger space by 1932. According to a 1931 contract, the business carried her name, but her widowed mother and one of her older sisters, Hooper Beck, divided the minority shares.

Frances Virginia proved to be a viable businesswoman. She was also an active leader and mentor, laying the groundwork for other women who would come behind her in the food service business. Her first student dietitian, Viola Foy, became Head Dietitian at Piedmont Hospital. Another, Sue White, became an assistant at the Frances Virginia. Frances Virginia was a member of national and Atlanta restaurant communities. In 1941 she was elected to the National Restaurant Association's Board of Directors, where she had served on its federal legislation committee the previous year. Locally, Frances Virginia hosted meetings of the Atlanta Association of Better Restaurants and held many influential positions within the organization including Advisory Board, Secretary, Vice President, and Chairman of the Health and Sanitation Committee. Most notably, in 1941 she was Second Vice President and was the only female of the four officers in the Association at that time.¹⁰

Toxey Jr. Whitaker, telephone conversation, November 2006.

⁹ "Miss Wikle Weds William Whitaker at All Saints," *unknown newspaper*, Dec. 23 1927, 7.

"Deaths," Daytona Beach News Journal, <http://www.news-journalonline.com>.

See Fig. of Frances Virginia with Toxey Jr. as a toddler.

¹⁰ Henley, *Sanatorium to Medical Center: The History of Piedmont Hospital 1905-1985*, 39.

"Atlantan Elected," *Atlanta Constitution*, Oct. 12 1941, no page, "Around Atlanta Frances Virginia Appointed to National Committee," *Atlanta Constitution*, Feb. 11 1940, 2A.

"Handlers of Food Urged to Qualify under Old Rules/Restaurant Association Backs Society," *Atlanta Constitution*, Feb. 4 1940, 5A.

"J.D. Walton Heads Restaurant Group ", *Atlanta Constitution*, Sept. 26 1941, 17.

Coleman, *The South's Legendary Frances Virginia Tea Room Cookbook*, 7.

Frances Virginia was also involved in women's groups of local and national divisions of the American Dietetic Association, representing Georgia at their 1924 convention. In addition, she hosted various colleges' female student and alumnae groups at her tea room as well as professional women's groups such as the American Association of Home Economists and the Business and Professional Women's Clubs.¹¹

In 1944, at age 49 and in poor health, Frances Virginia retired and sold her majority shares of the Frances Virginia Tea Room to her sister, Hooper Beck, and Hooper's husband, Will Beck. This consolidated all the tea room shares and operations in the hands of her family, friends and colleagues. These partners included her younger Georgia Dietetic Association friend, my aunt, Agnes Coleman New, who had followed Frances Virginia's home economics/dietetics education and career pattern.

Like Frances Virginia, Agnes New started as a home economics teacher, became a hospital dietitian in Savannah, Georgia, then moved to Atlanta as Supervisor of Dietetic Interns and Head of Dietetics at Emory Hospital, which had modeled its internship program after the one Frances Virginia began across town at Piedmont.¹² When Frances Virginia retired, New bought into the tea room partnership and assumed the dietitian's duties that Frances Virginia vacated—supervising back of the house operations, the kitchen, quality control and nutritional computations.

In 1957, Frances Virginia moved to New Smyrna Beach, Florida, with her husband, where she died July 4, 1962, from Hodgkin's Lymphoma, according to her son Toxey Whitaker

¹¹ "Atlantan to Attend Dietetic Convention," *The Atlanta Constitution*, Sep. 24 1924, 17.

"Miss Blanche Tansil, of Alabama, Elected Head of Dietetic Group," *Atlanta Constitution (1881-2001)*, Feb 18 1934, 4K.

¹² Henley, *Sanatorium to Medical Center: The History of Piedmont Hospital 1905-1985*, 39.

Jr. She is buried in Westview Cemetery in SW Atlanta.¹³ Coincidentally, this was one month after New, Pannell and Nabell, who were the last three Frances Virginia Tea Room partners, decided to retire, and closed the operation.

History of the Frances Virginia Tea Room: Popular on Poplar and Peachtree

It is unimaginable that women did not have free access to public dining rooms during Frances Virginia's era. However, except for tea rooms, many restaurants refused to serve women, particularly without an escort, as late as the 1950s. In Rich's, Atlanta's largest department store, the window and the menu at the Cockerel Grill proclaimed, "Men Only until after 3:00." One female Frances Virginia diner remembered, "I used to peer through the window and wonder why I couldn't enter! Why did I have to trudge upstairs and wait in line at the Magnolia [Tea] Room when there were empty seats downstairs in the Cockerel Grill? I could look in and see the men all sitting there, drinking the same iced tea and eating the same ham sandwiches that we women would order upstairs in the Magnolia Room."¹⁴

In other conversations about gendered social privileges, one woman remembered, "We didn't go inside The Varsity either. Well, maybe we could have, but it would have meant who knows what to your reputation...crowded together, body to body...with nothing but men in there." Another exclaimed, "Is that why we always stayed outside...in the car and ordered 'Curb

¹³ "Whitaker Rites Friday," *Marietta Daily Journal*, July 5 1962, 17A.

"Mrs. W. T. Whitaker Graveside Services," *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 6 1962, 25.

"Frances Virginia Whitaker Grave Marker," (Atlanta: Sweat, Chris Photographer, 1962).

¹⁴ Mildred Coleman, "Coleman-Family Personal Collection," (Atlanta 1860s-ongoing).

Service'? I never thought about it before!"¹⁵ There is no doubt that for 35 years Frances Virginia's tea room fulfilled the dining needs of an under-served market—women.

Affectionately called "The Frances Virginia," this tea room restaurant was a sharp contrast to our current notion of tea rooms. Although her establishment offered afternoon tea service for a short while, in today's terminology the Frances Virginia would be classified as a restaurant because of its size, service, and menu offerings. The Frances Virginia served a wide array of substantial, nutritious, hot meals as well as sandwiches, salads, desserts, and children's plates.

Frances Virginia customers were not the romantic, upper class, afternoon tea drinkers that we imagine today. The diners I interviewed saw themselves as active, modern young women and/or men living in their era. Instead of appealing to stay-at-home women with time on their hands, *The Atlanta Constitution* archives show that Frances Virginia directed her advertisements toward a mix of society: working people, tourists, sports fans, married and single males and females, couples, and family combinations.¹⁶

I met and interviewed diners who are now aged 54 to 98 and who remembered dining there, starting as youngsters and continuing throughout their lives. They reported being from upper to middle to working classes; urban and rural backgrounds; and from Catholic, Jewish

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Advertisement. "Display Ad 114 - No Title - Cordially Invite You to Dine Thanksgiving." *The Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 23 1939.

Advertisement. "Display Ad 23 1939 - Business Men! Meet Your Friends." *The Atlanta Constitution*, Jan 1 1939.

Advertisement. "Display Ad 32 - No Title- Dine at Frances Virginia...Hot Days." *The Atlanta Constitution*, Aug. 4 1930.

Advertisement. "Display Ad 32 - Couples Who Work." *The Atlanta Constitution*, Aug 18 1930.

Advertisement. "Display Ad 30 - Supper - Frances Virginia Tea Room on Poplar St." *The Atlanta Constitution*, Sept. 15 1930.

and multiple Protestant religions when they went there. Unlike Pittsburgh or New Orleans, the inland South had smaller and fewer ethnic populations. Members of the various Christian denominations saw themselves as distinct cultural groups within their communities. One diner remarked that Methodist preachers, their wives and church members always went to the Frances Virginia when they came to town for meetings. I personally remember regional and local Presbyterian and Baptist diners; and although “you might not want to marry one,” everyone welcomed the Roman Catholic families as “very nice people.” Since Jewish men and women were denied membership in most Atlanta country clubs, the Frances Virginia became “our place [Jewish men and women’s] to go for lunch,” according to one Frances Virginia fan.

Women indicated that the core diners during the 1940s were primarily single and married working females. One male diner argued, “No, there were an equal number of men and women in the late 1950s and 60s.” Although today’s sexual orientation terms were not commonly used until after Frances Virginia’s era, lesbian, gay and straight diners have shared their tea room memories. One gay man affirmed Frances Virginia’s hospitality and the tea room as a space where no one felt out of place because of their gender or sexual orientation.

Since Atlanta was racially segregated during the years that the Frances Virginia operated, all the customers were white. The employees were African American women and men, except for the white partners’ white female assistants and the four female line servers who worked downstairs at the Frances Virginia Tray Shop, a small cafeteria. The first Atlanta Frances Virginia Tea Room opened during the Roaring Twenties on July 21, 1927, upstairs at 62 ½ Poplar

Street, a central Atlanta location,¹⁷ “diagonally across from the post office.” This location would have meant easy, convenient access for patrons. A 1930s newspaper reporter said visitors praised the Frances Virginia as “one of the most popular” local restaurants, offering splendid, Southern-style food and service, with modest-to-elaborate luncheons and dinners for locals, visitors, social, or business meetings.¹⁸

After five successful years on Poplar Street and despite fears of the economic turn-down, Frances Virginia signed a bold pre-lease agreement in 1931, with plans to occupy the entire top floor of the fabulous new Collier Building at 175 Peachtree Street. This stretch of Peachtree Street was comparable to Broadway at Times Square in New York and she purposefully located her restaurant in this heart of the new downtown business and hospitality district. The tea room would be across from The Winecoff Hotel (now The Ellis boutique hotel), next door to the Paramount Theater, and a few doors from Loew’s Grand Theatre, where the movie *Gone With the Wind* would premier in 1939.¹⁹

This larger, 10,000 square foot space accommodated her increasing number of customers. The tea room featured a main dining room and a clubroom for parties, altogether seating 350. The kitchen and dishwashing rooms were adjacent, with additional preparation space in part of the building's basement. Employees changed clothes in a rooftop locker room. Although the new tea room opened during The Great Depression, *The Atlanta Constitution* reported that

¹⁷ This is currently part of the historically designated Fairly-Poplar District (Michael Rose, *Atlanta Then and Now* (San Diego, CA: Thunder Bay Press, 2001), 40. adjacent to the Georgia State University’s downtown Atlanta campus.

¹⁸ “Restaurants Receive Favorable Comment,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, Aug. 4 1930, 13.

¹⁹ Frances Virginia diners craned their necks to catch a glimpse of Clark Gable when Loew’s elegant movie house premiered “Gone With the Wind” in the 1930s. Elvis rocked Atlanta at the Paramount in the 1950s, especially a group of Frances Virginia teen diners who told me they tiptoed into his dressing room and ripped his shirt off—while wearing their proper hats and white gloves.

during its first year, the new Frances Virginia served over 300,000 meals.

In January 1935, the Frances Virginia expanded again. She added a small cafeteria downstairs on the sidewalk level called The Frances Virginia Tray Shop. It operated for at least three years. Together they fed an average of 1,400 women, men and children per day, Monday through Saturday. During World War II, the number of diners increased to 2,000 per day. In the 1960s, the number dwindled to less than 900 per day (New 1979).

Menus and advertisements show only slight variations in operating hours over the years—lunch from 11:30 AM until 2 or 3:00 PM, dinner from 5 to 7:30 or 8 PM, but always, “...Closed Saturday Evening and All Day Sunday.” Thanksgiving Day was their biggest day. The tea room was closed on Christmas.²⁰

According to contracts and family memories, over the years Frances Virginia’s female relatives bought and sold partnership shares to each other and/or to female colleagues who worked at various positions in the tea room. As Frances Virginia and her early partners died, retired, or sold their shares, Louise Nabell, Ruth Pannell and Agnes New bought the available shares. These three women continued Frances Virginia’s culinary traditions and service into the 1960s when sales diminished. Partly due to the population, transportation, and business shifts, suburban Lenox Square replaced downtown Peachtree Street as the city’s commercial, tourism, and entertainment center. Ironically, the Frances Virginia lost female patrons as the Women’s Movement began to surge, freeing women to challenge gender-based dining restrictions. Fac-

²⁰Advertisement, "Thanksgiving Dinner Display Ad 23-1929-Nov.28 " *The Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 28 1929, 18. ———, "Display Ad 21 - No Title - Thanksgiving Day Turkey Dinners," *The Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 25 1936, 7. Albert Goodgame, ongoing interviews since 1981 "Contracts" Nov 9, 2009 Nov. 9, 2009.

ing these changes and in their middle 60s, the partners decided to close rather than sign another ten-year lease.

Keeping the recipes, records, and favorite furniture, on May 30, they sold the remaining contents to the Collier Estate, owner of the building, which was managed by Burdett Realty. The partners celebrated the end of an era and their retirement with champagne. Meanwhile, the Collier Building's management rented the space to various other tenants. The neon sign, which advertised the Frances Virginia Tea Room, remained on the building, until the late 1970s, when the building was razed for the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority system. The Frances Virginia/Collier Building/Peachtree at Ellis site became Peachtree Center Station, which opened in 1982 near downtown Atlanta's historic district. I found some of the carved, ornamental stones from the Collier Building façade, but so far, like tourists looking for Tara, no one has found this piece of Atlanta's history.

My Relationship to Frances Virginia and the Frances Virginia Tea Room

Personal, experiential knowledge makes this project exciting and compelling. When Frances Virginia retired, Agnes Coleman New became the Frances Virginia dietitian. She was my mother's oldest sister and my favorite aunt. My mother, Jean Coleman Huff, had also been a tea room manager in the 1930s while a collegiate home economics student, and a home economist and during the Transition Period of First Wave feminism. My Aunt Agnes introduced me to the Frances Virginia hot muffins and hot kitchen when I could barely walk. Though not a home economist, my grandmother, Caroline Sprouse Coleman, wrote about food, fashions and history in her newspaper columns, magazine articles and books; most notably her book, *Five*

Petticoats on Sunday. Mentored by these matrilineal role models, I grew up surrounded by home economics ideals and feminist tea room rituals, and nourished by “Frances Virginia” food and hospitality.

Our large extended family celebrated everyday meals, and especially Thanksgiving, at Frances Virginia tables while Aunt Agnes raced back and forth supervising the kitchen. We chatted with the tea room partners and staff as insiders, listening to family stories, cooking mishaps, and dining room gossip. My cousin Caroline Smith Sherman, my younger sister Mary Agnes Huff, and I compared our observations, eventually majoring in home economics ourselves and starting home economics-based careers.²¹ Together we also negotiated its privileges and restrictions, as we became Second Wave feminists.

When the Frances Virginia closed and the partners divided the contents, as the dietitian partner, my aunt kept all the recipes and cookery files, some furniture, and tableware. When I graduated in 1965 and moved to Atlanta, she gave me a big box, saying, “Help yourself to any of these tea room things...to furnish your first apartment...and your home economics test kitchen at Miss Georgia Dairies,” where I started my first job.

Years later when the tea room building was being demolished, my mother admonished, “You’re a foods writer. You should record Agnes’ memories before her memory fades. She could divide the recipes into home size portions and you could write a Frances Virginia cookbook.” With the partners’ input and all their files, I published *The Frances Virginia Tea Room Cookbook* in 1981. I refer to some of the recipes in this thesis. The book, tea room history and

²¹ This thesis dedication acknowledges the relatives who studied home economics and their careers.

recipes generated enormous publicity and multiple printings.²² The *Southern Foodways Register* remarked, “Ostensibly a cookbook, this is the story of middle-class, Southern women’s lives from the 1930s to the 50s.”²³

I was inundated with requests for Frances Virginia programs and cooking classes. Once a corporate home economist and government consumer affairs officer, I began a free-lance career as ‘the tea room lady,’ traveling the country, speaking at conferences and civic club luncheons. During and after the programs, senior-age women recalled their careers, family life, and dining in their youth—all within the context of the Frances Virginia. Even the men became lively and animated, when remembering the once-popular tea room. I intuitively sensed an underlying phenomenon and historic significance. Although I did not yet know the scholarly terms, “gendered lives” or “social geography,” I scribbled the stories on napkins and started files on women and Atlanta history. While I was unaware of “theoretical frames” for exploring meanings, I subconsciously prepared for my future as a senior-age graduate student.

Knowing my interest, culinary colleagues and former tea room diners gave me their cherished, one-of-a-kind souvenirs. At my aunt’s death in 1992, I inherited the remainder of her Frances Virginia items. As a result, much of my thesis research is derived from or enhanced by my rare and comprehensive collection of tea room memorabilia and unpublished records. Historians call these artifacts “cultural materials.” Many scholars value nontraditional resources like Frances Virginia menus and cooking tools because they represent common, everyday life.

I began to wear the antique hats in memory of these donors whenever I spoke at or attended professional culinary meetings and public tea events. The flowered hats and beaded

²² Now in the 25th anniversary printing, more than 30,000 copies have been sold

²³ John Edge, “The Frances Virginia Tea Room Cookbook,” *Southern Foodways Register* 2000, 22.

purses add drama to my ongoing *herstorical* performances: “How We Dine, Dress, Drink and Drawl, Down South” and “The Stories That Tea Cups Could Tell.” These historic costumes brand me and link me to Frances Virginia’s pink silhouette and her branded image, as well as to women’s history in general.²⁴

In 2008, I applied for graduate school in women’s studies to develop a scholarly perspective regarding the artifacts, experiences and Frances Virginia’s story. When I studied the feminist movements, oral history, and womanist theory, I began to see my life and my life and my 50-year home economics career paralleled Frances Virginia’s: we both had four siblings; left the South for a dip into Northern culture and extra education; began innovative home economics careers and married late. Her pink and green signature colors were my favorites too.

Although subjective, my life experience provides first-hand information unavailable to younger historians unfamiliar with the era, as well as the contextual motivations and day-to-day projects of home economists. My memories, informal conversations, and recorded oral histories flesh out the published resources, and fulfill my scholarly objective.

I believe I was born to tell this story.

CHAPTER ONE: HOME ECONOMICS – A WOMAN’S BUSINESS

In this chapter, I rely on home economics scholarship to help illuminate how that field prepared and impassioned Frances Virginia for her work and contributed to its social impact. In

²⁴Professionally, I describe myself as a *herstorian*, a female who specializes in women’s stories about family and foodways, instead of traditional *histories* of war and political hierarchy. Synchronistically, my name is Mildred, ‘mild red,’ or pink, Frances Virginia’s signature color.

particular, I draw heavily from books by: Sarah Stage and Virginia B. Vincenti, *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession*, 1997; Jessie J. Mize, *The History of Home Economics at the University of Georgia*, 1983; Laura Shapiro's *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* and *From Catharine Beecher to Martha Stewart: A Cultural History of Domestic Advice* by Sarah A. Leavitt, 2002. Additional works from the 1920s elucidate home economics' science, business, and marketing foundations for the Twentieth century U. S. tea room movement of which the Frances Virginia Tea Room was only one example: the *Journal of Home Economics* articles by A. Gleason, "Tea Room Management from the Manager's Point of View," and Josephine and Jeannette Ware's "The Tea-Room Business;" and their Ware School training books, "A Course in Tea Room, Cafeteria and Motor Inn Management", 1927.²⁵

The Birth and Growth of Home Economics

The birth of feminist home economics was over 100 years in the making, beginning in the late 18th century when English feminist Mary Wollstonecraft espoused her educational ideology for girls. Her primary texts, "Thoughts on the Education of Daughters" and "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman," argued that women must be educated equally to men in order to

²⁵ Sarah Stage and Virginia B. Vincenti, *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), Jessie J. Mize, *The History of Home Economics at the University of Georgia* (Athens: Agee Publishers, Inc, 1983).

Laura Shapiro, *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* (New York: The Modern Library, 2001; reprint, paperback).

Sarah A. Leavitt, *From Catharine Beecher to Martha Stewart: A Cultural History of Domestic Advice* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

A. Gleason, "Tea Room Management from the Manager's Point of View," *Journal of Home Economics* 12, no. 4 (1920).

J. Ware, & Ware, J. , "The Tea-Room Business," *Journal of Home Economics* 16, no. 10 (1924).

Josephine Ware and Jeanette Ware, "A Course in Tea Room, Cafeteria and Motor Inn Management," (New York: The Ware School of Tea Room Management, 1927).

bring out their full potential and to enable them to become intelligent participants in home and society.²⁶

In the early 19th century, American educator, Catharine Beecher, who was the sister of Harriet Beecher Stowe, also advocated girls' education. Unlike Wollstonecraft, Beecher's curriculum included instructions on domestic (home) chores in her *Treatise on Domestic Economy: For the Use of Young Ladies at Home, and at School*.²⁷ Feminists have praised her because she advocated rigorous schooling for girls; and they have also deplored her because she insisted that women belonged at home and should only study the domestic sciences. However, she had no qualms about her own public leadership and career outside her home.

By the turn of the 20th century, Progressive Era educational theory and practice supplanted Beecher's notions. However, female education still revolved around what historian Barbara Welter calls the cult of domesticity, also known as "The Cult of True Womanhood"²⁸ whereby Victorian society presumed that women possessed innate abilities as mothers and keepers of the home. Progressives believed that women should use their so-called natural skills for *community* improvement projects. Unlike Beecher, progressives urged women to go *outside* their domiciles to perform "municipal housekeeping," a term introduced in 1900 by Henrietta I. Goodrich.²⁹ Goodrich, Ellen Richard's assistant at the Boston School of Housekeeping, used this term when she proposed professional preparation for women to perform social chores like

²⁶ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters: 1787* (New York: Woodstock Books, 1994), — — —, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1989).

²⁷ Catharine Esther Miss Beecher, *Treatise on Domestic Economy: For the Use of Young Ladies at Home, and at School* (Boston: Source Book Press/Marsh, Capen, Lyon, and Webb, 1841).

²⁸ Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2, Part 1 (1966).

²⁹ Sarah Stage, "Ellen Richards and the Social Significance of the Home Economics Movement," in *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession*, ed. Sarah Stage and Virginia B. Vincenti (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 27.

feeding the hungry, improving municipal water supplies, or addressing filthy streets and unsanitary food.

Ellen Richards, the first female MIT graduate in 1873,³⁰ believed that Beecher's *domestic* education and womanly attributes were not enough to facilitate these social change goals. She argued that women must have courses in chemistry, psychology and all the developing sciences in order to prepare themselves for home *and/or* municipal housekeeping tasks. Her educational concept incorporated human emotional and social, as well as biological, needs into a holistic ecosystem, that she termed *oekology*.³¹ Unfortunately, male scientists were using the less inclusive term, "ecology," so she gave way. Richards, the Progressives, and the more conservative advocates of *domestic economy* compromised on the term, "home economics." They incorporated their ideals and concepts into the home economics syllabus at the 1901 Lake Placid conference. For the next ten years of the Lake Placid conferences, leaders like Marion Talbot and Ellen Richards continued to advocate for an applied-science based curriculum and a collective political voice. In 1909, Richards founded the American Home Economics Association (AHEA)³² and rallied this diverse group into active membership. They urged home economists to become bold social activists, to change public policy, and to "move into a male world and clean it up."³³

These new home economics goals were feminist *and* womanly. Like Wollstonecraft, members of the American Association of Home Economics argued that educated women would be more valuable to society. They could apply their skills to meaningful social change projects

³⁰ Ibid., 22.

³¹ ———, "Introduction: Home Economics, What's in a Name," in *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession*, ed. Sarah Stage and Virginia B. Vincenti (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 6,27.

³² Stage, "Ellen Richards and the Social Significance of the Home Economics Movement," 22,17.

³³ Ibid., 30.

within, and outside, their homes. Archived catalogues, pamphlets and letters, as well as conversations with archivists at the University of Georgia, Spelman, Wesleyan and Agnes Scott Colleges, reveal similar beliefs in Georgia home economics education programs during Frances Virginia's era.³⁴ These first educators did not compromise on educational quality or promote female domestication. Home economics theory and training explicitly focused on empowering women and educating them to apply the latest scientific and social knowledge in chemistry, bacteriology and psychology inside and outside their homes. Thus, at the turn of the 19th century, "home economics" became the first educational philosophy to integrate social *and* biological science fields, and to lay out modern collegiate, activist careers for Atlanta women.

In 1908, Richards and other leaders structured the American Home Economics Association (AHEA) as their professional organization for home economics graduates.³⁵ During this era, the AHEA only served white home economists. African American home economists founded their own home economics associations. The American Home Economics Association membership and the organization's *Journal of Home Economics* provided research information, opportunities for continuing education, and a political voice. They also assured minimum education

³⁴ Sybil McNeil, Archivist, Telephone conversation on home economics at Wesleyan, Aug. 4, 2011.

Marianne Bradley, Archivist, Telephone conversation on home economics at Agnes Scott, Sept. 14, 2011.

"Agnes Scott College Bulletin: Dedicatory Exercises", in *Agnes Scott Internet Archive*, ed. Agnes Scott College (Decatur, GA: Agnes Scott College, 1911).

"Spelman College Bulletin," in *Catalogue for 1927-28 Announcements for 1928-29*, ed. Spelman College (Atlanta: Spelman College, 1928).

Taronda Spencer, Archivist, Aug. 03, 2011, "Spelman College Bulletin.", "Spelman College Announcements for 1927-1928 Catalogue for 1926-1927," ed. Spelman College (Atlanta: Spelman College, 1927), "Thirty-Eighth Annual Circular of Spelman Seminary for Women and Girls in Atlanta, Georgia," ed. Spelman Seminary (Atlanta: Spelman Messenger Office, 1919), "Thirty-Seventh Annual Circular of Spelman Seminary for Women and Girls in Atlanta, Georgia," in ed. Spelman Seminary (Atlanta: Spelman Messenger Office, 1918).

³⁵ In 1963 new American Home Economics Association by-laws eliminated racial segregation and in 1975 the first African American President was installed (Stage, "Ellen Richards and the Social Significance of the Home Economics Movement."308).

standards in all home economics program areas: education, extension service, home nursing, clothing and textiles, housing and furnishings, child and family development and, foods/nutrition/dietetics/institutional administration. This information and standardization would have been a boon to Frances Virginia's home economics training.

Because home economics records from Frances Virginia's alma mater are not available, I use records from comparable collegiate programs to imagine what lecture classes and laboratories Frances Virginia might have taken in preparation for her career. *The History of Home Economics* by Jessie Mize in 1983 and University of Georgia archival publications describe the University of Georgia's home economics Foods and Nutrition Management curriculum. In 1918, women were admitted to the University of Georgia. Gender rules mandated the women's choices: home economics or education. The University soon added the Peabody School of Education after the home economics program was started. Fortunately and notably, home economics included rigorous courses in physical sciences such as nutrition, chemistry, bacteriology, and social and psychological sciences, along with teaching the technical skills necessary to set up and manage a business. University of Georgia records state that the home economics food service program was specifically designed for women to operate tea rooms as well as cafeterias and hospital feeding programs.³⁶

Home Economics: An MBA or MRS?

According to women who majored in home economics during The Transition Era, home economics offered women a socially esteemed career and an alternate to marriage for financial

support.³⁷ Collegiate home economics, and especially dietetics, provided academic rigor and internships that were on a par with woman's preparation for an MBA in our twenty-first century. In the 1920s, colleges and high schools provided laboratories for women to gain specific technical, engineering, and management experience in the various sub-specialties such as foods and nutrition, sewing and textiles, and child development nurseries. These home economics classrooms and labs were organized to accommodate careers in dietetics and institutional management, government research, extension work, and teaching home economics, as well as preparation for marriage and homemaking. According to a former Dean, the University of Georgia operated one food service lab, which was called the tea room in Dawson Hall. As a student, I valued this hands-on training. Many of the laboratories are still in operation, although they are no longer called tea rooms.

Both Caucasian and African American women led this premier field of home economics. For example, in the early, segregated, Transition Era of the South Carolina Extension Service [home economics] Program, the white Extension Service Program headquartered at Winthrop College in Rock Hill, South Carolina. Simultaneously, an African American, Mattie Mae Fitzgerald, was the "state supervisor of Negro [women's] work" at the all black South Carolina State University.³⁸

The rural communities respected these home economists, called Home Demonstration Agents. Reports of Fitzgerald's club members' zeal and work quantity indicates she was effec-

³⁷ Huff, Jean Coleman, conversations, home economics and Frances Virginia stories. 1945-2003.

³⁸ Historical Collection South Carolina State University, "A Digital Collection Celebrating the Founding of the Historically Black College and University," HBCU Library Alliance, Powered by CONTENTdm, [//contentdm.auctr.edu/cdm4/browse.php?CISOROOT=/schc&CISOSORT=title|r](http://contentdm.auctr.edu/cdm4/browse.php?CISOROOT=/schc&CISOSORT=title|r).

tive; she was able to empathize with women, befriend their families, and mix with community preachers and teachers, thus negotiating complex social, political and professional situations.³⁹

While men were learning to research and engineer industrial sites, all female home economics programs empowered women, who, especially in the South, were not permitted to attend male academies. Home economics lecture and lab experiments taught female students, who in turn advised society as a whole, on the value of researching and engineering homemaking methods. Home economics researchers compared various scientific and mathematical ways of accomplishing home tasks for better quality and efficiency. Some projects focused particularly on alleviating farm wives' drudgery. The home economics concept was to enable women to keep house quickly and effectively, and to nourish and clothe the family. This would free them to use their talents as professional homemaker volunteers or paid employees, to serve society by reducing abuses and problems in the community.⁴⁰

From Domesticity to Domestic Output, Home to Home Country

During the 1900s, industrialization transformed the rhetoric of business and education, in turn influencing social behavior. Domestic studies, Beecher's nineteenth century model for female education, became obsolete as the word "domestic" changed meaning. *The Oxford English Dictionary* online reveals the timelines and definitions, which illustrate how the words "home" and "domestic" expanded. Previously limited to one's personal sphere, one's private,

³⁹ Harris, Carmen. "Grace under Pressure: The Black Home Extension Service in South Carolina, 1919-1966." Chap. 10 In *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession*, edited by Sarah Stage and Virginia B. Vincenti, 203-28. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.

⁴⁰ Stage, Sarah. "Ellen Richards and the Social Significance of the Home Economics Movement." In *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession*, edited by Sarah Stage and Virginia B. Vincenti, 347. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.17-19.

family domain, the meanings evolved into one's hometown and home nation. Similarly, the terms and concepts of domestic studies expanded, evolving into home and economics, whereby what women learned to do in the home could be applied to a greater arena of one's home town and home country.

In this gender-segregated era, home economists tackled a wide diversity of problems: testing urban water supplies, calculating effects of vitamin deprivation, designing warm clothing from feed sacks, and teaching parliamentary procedure in women's club organizations.⁴¹ In 1917, as World War I mounted, almost 100 home economists met to found the American Dietetics Association (ADA) in order to assist the military, farmers, and farmwomen to feed and maintain the health of soldiers and citizens around the world.⁴² Frances Virginia became an influential member, according to newspaper reports.

The American Home Economics Association (AHEA) and ADA aimed to empower white American women as individuals, as members of their families and as leaders of the world. Soon there were both Negro and white home economists working in government agencies, schools, the military, and hospitals in every state. At first, gendered, segregationist state laws compelled all of the white women to work under male supervisors and Negro/African American home economists to work under white women. However, by the late 1960s, home economists of both races were fully assimilated with equal membership into the American Home Economics Asso-

⁴¹ Harris, Carmen. "Grace under Pressure: The Black Home Extension Service in South Carolina, 1919-1966." In *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession*, edited by Sarah Stage and Virginia B. Vincenti, 203-28. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997. 211

⁴² Nyhart, Lynn K. "Home Economists in the Hospital." In *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession*, edited by 125-144. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.135-9.

ciation.⁴³ Since there was no field of women's studies in the early 1900s, the feminist home economics education enabled Frances Virginia's training and influenced her notions of self, family, and community empowerment. In many respects, home economics was the Women's Studies of this era. This education prepared both white and black female graduates not only to *know something*, but also to *do something* with their knowledge to benefit society. With "home" in the title, home economics training was considered a socially acceptable field for women. Furthermore, it offered women a way to acquire and practice their newfound knowledge of science, business, and management in public spaces, such as tea rooms.

In 1917, Frances Virginia's Industrial Home Economics diploma conferred more than a general liberal arts or teacher's degree. Her alma mater, The Georgia State College for Women, taught liberal arts, but also included scientific and business education, plus technical methodology. Her follow up internship in Dietetics/Food Service Management in New York enabled her to support herself financially. As a home economist with a dietetics specialty, she would have had a gendered job description but a grand opportunity for advancement and activist service in the medical field. Females were not generally allowed to become physicians, but Frances Virginia and other dietitians would work side by side with physicians in disease therapy and research.

The internship also provided a socially acceptable opportunity for her, a single female, to travel outside her Southern culture and gain experience in New York and New Jersey. One may assume this knowledge further contributed to her success in the Atlanta hospitality business. Knowing what people from "Northern" cultures were like, and what foods their more

⁴³ Vincenti, Virginia B. "Home Economics Moves into the Twenty-First Century." In *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession*, edited by Sarah Stage and Virginia B. Vincenti, 301-20. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.308-310.

ethnically diverse populations preferred to eat, was to come in handy in her own business. Having been a stranger outside her home community would have also enabled her to be more empathetic to the tourists who visited Atlanta and young women who left their small hometowns to work and eat in her urban Atlanta tea room.

Home Economic and Women's Studies Kinship

This work examines Transition Era home economics as activist work and altruistic social philosophy. It enables social science professionals from a variety of fields to acknowledge the kinship between women's studies and home economics. They are cousins through their feminist birth and womanist methods of action. Even if these terms were not used when home economics was founded, both fields aim to empower people regardless of age, race, sex, religion, gender, class, and culture or world location. Although Women's Studies and Home Economics terminologies and their specific activist projects may differ, both fields are concerned with six common areas of daily life:

- ~Food quality and availability
- ~Financial resources for individuals and communities
- ~Adequate housing and life-affirming furnishings
- ~Fashion, psychology, relationships of bodies and clothing
- ~Family, self, and kinship identities
- ~Altruistic values as a motive for activist service

Home economists, like Frances Virginia, tackled problems of food sanitation in homes or institutional kitchens. For example, Frances Virginia pushed for changes in Atlanta's regulations

to improve restaurant sanitation. In comparison, students in women's studies programs today might examine the sociopolitical factors that contribute to unsanitary conditions in restaurants. Women's studies practitioners would call themselves social activists, whereas home economists would just call themselves home economists. As people working to change society, they are kin as social change activists. Even though they approach problems differently, they tackle these issues in order to make the community a more wholesome place for the inhabitants.

Whether called oekology, municipal housekeeping, or home economics, this activist ideology and training was fully incorporated into the home economics mission by the turn of the twentieth century. Like women's studies, home economics has evolved. Today it is variously termed "Family and Consumer Sciences," "Community Nutrition," and "Human Ecology." This terminology reflects the profession's twenty-first century academic and activist social objectives which have been influenced directly or indirectly by women's studies and feminism.

A New Site of Women's Empowerment

Stage and Vincenti's book, *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession*, describes the new home economics social activist model that colleges taught when Frances Virginia matriculated in the early 1900s. In 1909, the home economics profession's mission statement indicated that its idea of "home" was not limited to house walls.⁴⁴ There were parallels between the rhetoric of the 1800s Industrialization Era, Progressive Era education, and women's home economics curricula established during the First Wave Feminist Movement. These courses further expanded women's career possibilities during the 1920s and 1930s. Stage

⁴⁴ Stage, "Ellen Richards and the Social Significance of the Home Economics Movement," 17.

and Vincenti's research clearly places home economics in the context of feminist theory and history by positioning "the home in relation to the larger polity, encouraging reform," based on the emerging 20th century social science movements.⁴⁵

Several chapters in Stage and Vincenti's text describe other home economists who supported workplace colleagues and provided leadership in their national home economics/dietetic associations. Personally and professionally, they engaged in social projects along with other progressive women concerned with issues like the lack of consumer protection laws, child labor, food adulteration, water safety, farm and city living conditions.

By the time Frances Virginia entered college, the Home Economics curriculum had grown from domestic training, *i.e.*, preparing girls for heterosexual marriage and home life, into a collegiate curriculum that aimed to graduate fully-educated women who would become community and national leaders. This produced a professionalized cadre of Caucasian and African American women, able to support themselves regardless of marital status. Home economists trained these women to do as well as to think, the prime requirements for social activists. They negotiated the complexities of American society, as well as local and national politics. They also organized community and state networks of rural and urban women, intricately maneuvering to accept some restrictions and to challenge other boundaries of race, class, sex, age, and gender.⁴⁶ Home economists' leadership in the tea room movement was a prime example of how they challenged the restrictions of gendered public dining and female business ownership by calling their food service operations *tea rooms* instead of restaurants.

⁴⁵ ———, "Introduction: Home Economics, What's in a Name," 5.

⁴⁶ South Carolina State University, "A Digital Collection Celebrating the Founding of the Historically Black College and University."

During this time, most people assumed that because of their sex, women were initially best qualified to perform social civic duties. Because women filled mothering roles in the home, society expected that women could easily expand home skills like cooking, cleaning, and caring for children into commercial skills like institutional cookery and social work. Since women dealt with these issues every day in their own homes, women would be more effective than men in reducing unsanitary conditions and addressing social problems like hunger, malnutrition, and adequate housing in their communities. In addition, female home economists believed that they could be more efficient because they were armed with the latest scientific research. Thus prepared, female home economists intended to empower other women and to change the world.⁴⁷

Facilitating the Tea Room Movement

Home economics enabled women to move from the home into professional careers. Cynthia Brandimarte's article, "To Make the Whole World Homelike: Gender Space and America's Tea Room Movement" and Jan Whitaker's book, *Tea at the Blue Lantern Inn: A Social History of the Tea Room Craze in America* document the development and history of a massive American tea room movement that began during World War I and spread rapidly. Brandimarte charts the tea room path that female tea room entrepreneurs and diners took as they moved from home into public spaces in the early 1900s.⁴⁸ My research asserts that as tea room founders, these home economists/dietitians such as Frances Virginia, whether they called themselves

⁴⁷ Stage, "Ellen Richards and the Social Significance of the Home Economics Movement," 29-31.

⁴⁸ Brandimarte, Cynthia A. "To Make the Whole World Homelike: Gender Space and America's Tea Room Movement." *Winterthur Portfolio* 30, no. 1 Spring (1995): 1-19.

feminists or not, embodied feminist theory which asserts that women should have equal access to public space as men. They resisted and transformed earlier twentieth century 1900s gendered society with their home-like tea rooms. Using their everyday knowledge and home cooking skills, along with home economics training, they empowered themselves in socially acceptable ways. Rather than attempting to desegregate men's restaurants, they established their own, which were known as tea rooms.

While linking feminism to home economics has merit, I prefer the term womanism to feminism to characterize these home economists' actions. I will expand on this topic in the next section. Womanism includes every day cooking and serving of meals as an action that affects society's well being. While home economics did not focus on ameliorating gender discrimination, which is a specific goal of feminism, the academic studies were rigorous and empowering. While the goal was to empower women, the methodology originated in traditional women's work and served as its extension into the public sphere. Home economists in the foods and nutrition branches employed womanist, or everyday, actions of serving others in order to lead them. Their social change methods included cooking, caretaking, cleaning, and family hospitality to improve family and/or individual finances, health, and well-being. These home economics goals are also womanist goals and methods, because anyone can apply them. However, professional home economists, like women's studies researchers today, aimed to improve their skills and methodology in order to become progressively more effective in empowering and assisting women.

Whitaker notes that home economics education and dietetic internships strengthened the tea room movement. Many collegiate home economics programs operated campus food

services called 'tea rooms.' These further developed females' culinary and management skills, enabling women to compete successfully with male restaurateurs in grand-scale food service operations.⁴⁹ One University of Georgia brochure points directly to tea room training as a method for empowering women. It states that the home economics food service program is designed to enable female home economics graduates to manage *commercial businesses*, specifically tea *rooms*, cafeterias, and hospital feeding programs.⁵⁰

In another example, the Spelman College's cooking program began in 1901 with 119 African American female students. The original curriculum reflected Beecher's notion of domestic studies. In their 1917-1918 circular, Spelman proudly noted the change to a full academic and practical home economics curriculum. The college now offered a Bachelor of Arts degree, as well as diplomas for teacher's education, professional home economics, and nursing; and certification for courses in millinery, and cooking.⁵¹

The 38th Annual Circular proclaims advanced studies in dietetics and institutional management. While this brochure does not specifically mention tea rooms, it enables us to note the way the program emphasized female empowerment. The study of home economics provided higher education as well as *commercial* training to manage public cafeterias and dormitories. It also included food service education for home and social functions for "large numbers of guests."⁵²

Although this may not seem revolutionary today, it paved the way for the involvement of greater numbers of credentialed women to participate in the public sphere. Starting with

⁴⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁰ University of Georgia, "Home Economics Programs at the University of Georgia," ed. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library of the University of Georgia (Athens: University of Georgia, 1920s).

⁵¹ "Thirty-Seventh Annual Circular of Spelman Seminary for Women and Girls in Atlanta, Georgia," 11-12, 17.

⁵² "Thirty-Eighth Annual Circular of Spelman Seminary for Women and Girls in Atlanta, Georgia," 23-24.

small home-style tea rooms, women next took on the restoration of historic houses for larger entrepreneurial tea and food services, often adding handicraft sales for charitable causes. After women moved their businesses into these public spaces, they ventured into larger and larger commercial food service enterprises, still referred to as tea rooms. Frances Virginia followed this pattern of small-scale to large-scale operation. These commercial spaces offered food and hospitality at a time when most restaurants, as mentioned previously, did not welcome women, especially those without a male escort.⁵³

Current historians have largely forgotten her, but there are more than 300 newspaper articles, reporters' interviews, and public records of Frances Virginia's activities and comments. With hindsight, we can peer through bifocal glasses shaped by a historical frame that encircles feminist and womanist lenses. Although Frances Virginia never labeled herself feminist or womanist — and indeed, these terms were not actually in circulation as such at this time — we can observe Frances Virginia and analyze how she demonstrated feminist and womanist activism through home economics' food service hospitality. In the next section, I take a closer look at the contextual history of Frances Virginia's era.

The Transition Era

History and Feminist Waves

Many scholars identify the French Revolution of the 1790s and Englishwoman Mary Wollstonecraft's "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" as Western heralds of the modern

⁵³ Clifford M. Kuhn, Fernard West, and Harlon E. Joye, *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948* (Atlanta; Athens: The University of Georgia Press in conjunction with The Atlanta Historical Society, 1990), 190.

feminist movement and the impetus for organized waves of activity. Rory Dicker, author of *A History of U.S. Feminisms*, defines the First Wave as spanning the mid-1800s to early 1900s, during which time women focused on achieving female suffrage.⁵⁴ Other important first-wave themes included women's education, marriage, labor and specific social injustices such as the right to speak in public when campaigning for suffrage or abolition. In the United States, notable First Wave leaders included former slave Sojourner Truth, *The Woman's Bible* author Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Matilda Joselyn Gage of the National Woman Suffrage Association.

Linda Nicholson writes about the Second Wave of feminism in her book, *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, which started in the 1960s and lasted through the 1980s.⁵⁵

Dicker and Nicholson say that Second Wave feminists emphasized the connection between the personal and the political and introduced the concept of patriarchy. These two works describe the political movements which intensified in the 1960s: professional women's demand for Women's Rights and the Women's Liberation ideology of the New Left. Prominent issues included work oppression, differences between men and women, as well as issues between women, such as lesbianism, race, class and housewives' dissatisfaction stemming from earlier forced resignation of many women from their WWII jobs in preference to men. Noted authors included Simone de Beauvoir, Carol Gilligan, Nancy Chodorow and the Combahee River Collective.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1989.
Dicker, Rory C. *A History of U.S. Feminisms*. Berkeley: Seal press, 2008.1-10.

⁵⁵ Nicholson, Linda, ed. *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*. New York: Routledge, 1997. 1-5.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 1-5.

The 1920s to the 1960s

Although it has been contested by some authors, such as Astrid Henry, the wave theory of western feminism organizes women's activities and ideals into time periods based on coherency of themes and approaches. Dicker's history implies that after women won the right to vote in the U. S. in 1920, they became inactive, even docile, as there were few remaining gender inequities of importance until Second Wave Feminism. One author, William L. O'Neill, remarked in *Feminism in America: A History*, "The [First Wave] struggle for women's rights ended in the 1920s.... The emancipation of women was about as complete as it would be."⁵⁷ Wikipedia, a popular online encyclopedia, furthers the illusion. It too leaves a gap between Suffrage and Civil Rights.⁵⁸ This silence begs us to wonder what women were doing for 40 years before the Second Wave surged.

Some scholars comfortably lump these mid-1920s to early 1960s into First Wave Feminism. However, in her Georgia State University lectures for the courses, "History & Theory of European and U.S. Feminisms" and "New Directions in Feminism," Dr. Layli Maparyan describes this period between the First and Second waves as "The Transition Era."⁵⁹ The words transition and transformation aptly describe women's metamorphosis during the Roaring 20s, through The Great Depression, war-torn 40s and into the 1960s. Angela Y. Davis's classic historical text, *Women, Race, and Class*, describes women's participation in labor, socialist, communist, anarchist and peace movements during this period, particularly between World War I and II; they conscientized their peers about women's issues and often attained positions of political leader-

⁵⁷ O'Neill, William L. *Feminism in America: A History*. Second Revised ed. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1989, 60.

⁵⁸ "History of Feminism." Wikipedia, wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_feminism.

⁵⁹ Maparyan, Layli, women's studies lectures. 2010.

ship and influence.⁶⁰ Layli Maparyan points out that the Transition Era was also a period of women's active involvement in the colonial independence movements around the world, particularly in Africa and Asia garnering the participation, for instance, of African American women. Remarkably, home economics also arose during this period, as I will detail in a subsequent section.

Although I have not found other sources for this term, Maparyan's "Transition Era" concept supports my analysis of Frances Virginia and the Frances Virginia Tea Room as a distinct, potent and important moment in women's history and provides me with a useful framework for analyzing Frances Virginia's gendered activism. Frances Virginia's Atlanta home economics career, the Frances Virginia Tea Room beginnings and closure coincide precisely with Dr. Maparyan's transition era dates and activisms, spanning the years 1920-1962.

During feminism's First Wave and throughout the Transition Era – indeed, prior to the Civil Rights Movement – institutionalized racism reigned in U.S. society, barring Black Americans from most public accommodations. Although it is less widely discussed, white women were also barred from certain public accommodations, most notably restaurants. Until the 1960s, American's legal and social systems enforced patriarchal assumptions and assigned geographical restrictions for women of any race, generally forbidding them to enter certain types of restaurants,⁶¹ and especially bars,⁶² without a male escort. Women could be targeted for arrest or

⁶⁰ Davis, Angela Y. *Women, Race and Class*. London: The Women's Press Ltd, 1982.

⁶¹ Rich's. "The Cockerel Grill Menu." In *Rich's Department Store restaurant*, edited by Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center. Atlanta: Rich's Department Store, circa 1950s.

"Inside the Varsity 1959 - What'll Ya Have!". black and white photo of Varsity restaurant, circa 1950s. Atlanta: Pullen Library, Special Collections Department, Georgia State University, 1959.

⁶² Taylor, Janet, conversations, Kentucky restrictions. Feb. 27, 2011.

eyed with suspicion for merely being alone in a restaurant.⁶³ This continued until Civil Rights activists, in concert with the Second Wave feminists, agitated for passage of the 1960s Women's and Civil Rights Acts. However, Transition Era women, like Frances Virginia, resisted these oppressions, by opening their own restaurants called 'tea rooms.' The designation *tea room* represented a socially acceptable place for women to dine, to own, or to work. Tea rooms welcomed women as diners whether they had escorts or not. They were essentially places created by women for women.⁶⁴

When I began this project, there was little information about African American owned tea rooms. However, Jan Whitaker's website, www.janwhitaker.net, now reports, "there were many of these tea rooms and they shared numerous characteristics with tea rooms run by and for whites."⁶⁵ While Frances Virginia's restaurant activism benefited white women as a constituency far more than the Black women she employed, Frances Virginia's activism was not without some racial consciousness, even if limited.

Arguably, tea rooms are as misunderstood and misrepresented as the Transition Era itself in terms of serving as activist feminist spaces. By recovering and presenting the cultural and historical context of Transition Era and tea rooms as progressive, enterprising and sedulous spaces, I am challenging assumptions that Transition Era women were politically passive and docile and that tea rooms were apolitical and constrained sites. Framing Frances Virginia and her tea room within the Transition Era, between First and Second Wave feminist eras, helps us

⁶³ Kuhn, Clifford M., Fernard West, and Harlon E. Joye. *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948*. Atlanta; Athens: The University of Georgia Press in conjunction with The Atlanta Historical Society, 1990, 190.

⁶⁴ Whitaker, Jan. *Tea at the Blue Lantern Inn: A Social History of the Tea Room Craze in America*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002.

⁶⁵ Whitaker, Jan. "African-American Tea Rooms." Jan Whitaker, www.janwhitaker.net.

understand the vigor and breadth of women's work during this so-called uneventful feminist era and acknowledge Frances Virginia's tea room as an activist site.

The Transition Era was a time of enormous growth for women when progressive, feminist, home economics education and experiential training provided the base for activist careers for a significant segment of women. A female-led tea room movement initiated by and for women was particularly influential. Tea rooms provided a socially acceptable space for displaced urban and rural women, as well as tourists, to eat and find employment outside the home.⁶⁶ Tea rooms helped to ameliorate some of the disparities between women because they welcomed multiple classes, religious denominations and ages, even if initially racially segregated.

Like all disciplines, women's studies are guilty of privileging some stories over others. As a result, millions of U.S. women's actions have been forgotten or ignored.⁶⁷ To wit, because Transition Era women operated *tea rooms* instead of *restaurants*, and were called *home economists* instead of *business executives* or *social activists*, they have been marginalized in history books and negatively stereotyped by younger generations, ill-equipped to appreciate their significance. Local and national home economists did *women's work* and used *ordinary* methods. They were more concerned with day-to-day operations and the desire to improve the lives of ordinary people, and less concerned about their own operational titles. The depth and breadth of their social influence has not been recognized because of the home economics terminology

⁶⁶ Brandimarte, Cynthia A. "To Make the Whole World Homelike: Gender Space and America's Tea Room Movement." *Winterthur Portfolio* 30, no. 1 Spring (1995): 1-19.

⁶⁷ Phillips, Layli. *The Womanist Reader*. Edited by Layli Phillips. New York: Routledge, 2006.

and its connotations. Yet, as I will explore later, womanism provides a lens through which to see activism such as Frances Virginia's.

Alone in her Kitchen but Not a Lone Activist

Other Transitional Era women activists in labor, peace and educational movements might have marched in groups or organized their plans in conjunction with other women. Home Demonstration Agents or Georgia Power Company Home Economists might have had professional friends in their government offices and corporate test kitchens. Frances Virginia did not have the company of home economists working beside her in her tiny kitchen office. However, Frances Virginia was not operating alone. She had access to a network of home economics colleagues and her professional organizations: The American Home Economics Association, the Georgia Dietetics Association, and the Georgia State College for Women Alumnae.

Although Angela Davis does not use the term "The Transition Era" in her book, *Women, Race and Class*, she traces parallel movements that converged during the 1830s -1960s.⁶⁸ She notes suffrage, the peace movement, birth control and eugenics, education, communist women's activisms – and especially the labor movement. Home economics and the tea room movement intersected with these well-known women's movements. White rural and urban home economists, like Frances Virginia, went into the food service business. They joined African American and immigrant women, who had historically worked outside their homes to support their families.⁶⁹ Multiple classes went into the workforce during World War I and repeated the process during World War II as the government encouraged female patriotism, picturing Rosie

⁶⁸Davis, Angela Y. *Women, Race and Class*. London: The Women's Press Ltd, 1982.{Davis, 1982 #772}

⁶⁹Ibid.

the Riveter as a female model. "There were many job possibilities in Atlanta, especially at the Bell Bomber plant, in Marietta," according to Jean Coleman, who worked nearby as a Cobb County Home Economist/Home Demonstration Agent.⁷⁰

While historians recognize Rosie's patriotic symbolism, few people remember home economists' labor to make mattresses,⁷¹ and patriotic ads purchased by women's businesses like Frances Virginia's.⁷² The Frances Virginia Tea Room partners supported the war effort in advertising copy. The Coleman sisters⁷³ and the tea room partners were among the 60,000 career women who worked as home economists, managers and secretaries for war-related Federal agencies, as well as local businesses like First National Bank, Southern Bell Telephone, Southern Railway, Rich's and Davison's department stores. In addition to civilian women, several hundreds of female military recruits were being trained at Frances Virginia's alma mater in Milledgeville.⁷⁴

Women, Race and Class reminds readers that women's work, namely housework, is most noticed when it *isn't* done. Likewise, food availability and the price of meals are most noticeable when people are hungry. Throughout the 1940s, Atlanta's 60,000 famished career women⁷⁵ needed a place to eat during their 30-60 minute lunchtime. While some brought their lunch, several of these workers told me they spent some of their new wages on lunch time

⁷⁰ Huff, Jean Coleman, conversations, home economics and Frances Virginia stories. 1945-2003.

⁷¹ Coleman reports Home Demonstration Agents working overtime to stuff and sew mattresses from local cotton, "The most back-breaking work I've ever done" Jean Coleman Huff, conversation on my home economics work, 1945-2003.

⁷² Advertisement. "Display Ad 19 -1943-July 31the Army Air Forces Support." *The Atlanta Constitution (1881-2001)* July 31 1943.

⁷³ Born in rural South Carolina, Agnes Coleman New, Emory Hospital Head Dietitian and Frances Virginia Tea Room partner, and her younger sister Jean Coleman Huff, cafeteria supervisor and government home economist, both worked in the Atlanta area during the Depression and WWII.

I grew up hearing their stories of home economists' work during these years and afterwards.

⁷⁵ "Rich's Atlanta Salutes the New South!". In *Rich's Department Store*, Atlanta History Center Archives. Atlanta: Rich's Department Store, 1942.

treats at the Frances Virginia, saving the rest for down payments on homes in the 1950s, like other women did.⁷⁶

During the Depression, Frances Virginia applied home economics science, management and institutional food preparation techniques in order to operate her business of feeding and maintaining the public health, particularly women on budgets, and still having profits to pay her workers and suppliers. She skillfully planned menus to manage her tea room's allotment of sugar, coffee and other rations, for example, substituting syrup for sugar in her wartime pies.⁷⁷ Like some women, she conserved during World War II to enable the government to ship protein-rich meat and energy-dense foods to soldiers overseas. In 1942, her Better Restaurant Association members united, agreeing to limit sugar use to 80% of the amount consumed in 1941. They also prepared "a mimeographed sheet containing eight suggestions for conserving sugar."⁷⁸ As a trained dietitian, Frances Virginia could have been the one to calculate these recipe substitutions for the association.

Frances Virginia's leadership is all the more impressive since she inserted herself into the white male restaurant hierarchy. Over the years, male Association presidents were quoted by media, so we do not have quotes from Frances Virginia about her plans for the association like we have regarding her tea room activities. Men also controlled the major offices of the Atlanta Association of Better Restaurants, except secretarial duties, which were left to the women. Although women were assumed to be good *home* cooks, *public* food service and chefs' posi-

⁷⁷ Coleman, Mildred Huff. *The South's Legendary Frances Virginia Tea Room Cookbook*. 25th Anniversary Edition ed. Nashville, TN: Favorite Recipes Press, 2006. Reprint, 6th printing in 2006. Diners tell me they simply ate out when their meat, coffee or sugar ration tickets were gone. They never considered that restaurants were operating under the same rationing system or wondered how tea room owners managed (Coleman, "Coleman-Family Personal Collection."

⁷⁸ "Life Is Sweet but Not to Diner-Outers." *The Atlanta Constitution*, Feb. 22 1942. 12B.

tions were assigned to men. Therefore, the better restaurant group was predominately a male organization. Atlanta city directories relegated women-run businesses, like Frances Virginia, Ma Sutton or Ma Hull's,⁷⁹ to the less prestigious categories of lunchroom, boarding house or tea room.⁸⁰ These male spheres did not particularly welcome advice on social equality or believe it was necessary to improve their employees' lives. One former restaurant association President remembers, "The men didn't want to take orders from me or each other. Or make changes that would be good for humanity, like racial integration, if it might potentially hurt *their* business."⁸¹

Nevertheless, Frances Virginia engendered the men's respect and cooperation. For instance, during Frances Virginia's era, when women restaurant association members were commonly the local Secretary, Frances Virginia became Vice President. Furthermore, she chaired a national committee, the National Restaurant Association's Committee on Sanitation.⁸² As a high-ranking female who attended board meetings, Frances Virginia was positioned to be mentored by influential men and learn how to maneuver as a woman within their glass ceiling system. Rather than staying in the gender-restricted fields of dietetics or teaching, she left these early career positions, determined to be her own boss in her own tea room. Wisely and like many other women in the tea room movement,⁸³ according to interviews, she collaborated with other capable home economists and family such as her sisters, her mother and nieces.

Frances Virginia's family and friends assumed various partnership shares as active par-

⁷⁹ According to Atlanta historian, Cliff Kuhn, Ma Hull's was a female run boarding house in Inman Park; Ma Sutton's was "the [African American] place to eat" in the Sweet Auburn area. I personally remember that women ate in groups at Hull's in the 1970s but I've found no accounts of specifically women dining at Sutton's.

⁸⁰ Maclachlan, Gretchen. 11-09-09 in person, 10-19-09 telephone, 2009.

⁸¹ Negri, Ed, and Michael J. Cain. *Herren's an Atlanta Landmark: Past, Present and Future*. Roswell: Roswell Publishing Company, 2005. Negri. Oral History, taped June 20 2011.

⁸² "Around Atlanta Frances Virginia Appointed to National Committee." *Atlanta Constitution*, Feb. 11 1940.

⁸³ Brandimarte, Cynthia A. "To Make the Whole World Homelike: Gender Space and America's Tea Room Movement." *Winterthur Portfolio* 30, no. 1 Spring (1995): 1-19.

ticipants over the years. This allowed each woman to maximize her talents and energy with Frances Virginia, as major partner, to maintain her home economics and business objectives. Using her positions of authority within the tea room domain as well as in her professional associations, she was able to mentor and influence others. Indeed, by instilling her community housekeeping ideals and womanist style hospitality, she reached far outside of Atlanta promoting restaurant sanitation, Southern hospitality, and a woman's way of doing business that focused on more than just the bottom line.

For instance, as the 1941, newly-elected vice president of the Better Restaurant Association, she worked on the board with the organization's president, J. D. Walton, who also served on the Board of Directors of the Atlanta Convention and Visitor's Bureau.⁸⁴ This was one of Atlanta's most elite and influential business positions. By volunteering for leadership roles in Atlanta Association of Better Restaurants, Frances Virginia positioned herself to work among men who had power and influence them behind the scenes.

In one case, a newspaper article recounts that Frances Virginia worked with physicians and the Better Restaurant Association to update and strengthen Atlanta's food handler's ordinance, which would affect 10,500 workers. Tighter examination methods would discourage false examinations by unscrupulous physicians as well as promote better sanitation and reduce the spread of human and food-borne diseases. It would also reduce the risk of syphilis infection,⁸⁵ which had no good treatment at the time, without the life-saving antibiotics we have for its treatment today.

⁸⁴ "J.D. Walton Heads Restaurant Group ". *Atlanta Constitution*, Sept. 26 1941, 17.

⁸⁵ "Handlers of Food Urged to Qualify under Old Rules/Restaurant Association Backs Society." *Atlanta Constitution*, Feb. 4 1940, 5A.

Ed Negri, President of the Atlanta Restaurant Association during the 1950s, remarked that it was extremely difficult to get the men to police themselves when he was in the association.⁸⁶ Thus, getting Better Restaurant members to agree to restrictive sanitation rules was a triumph for Frances Virginia and indicates the quality of her leadership as a woman. Her positions as an officer and committee chair influenced the health of people who never even entered her tea room. Her concern and leadership in the field of sanitation and restaurant regulations are still positively affecting us today.

Whether she called herself a feminist or not, “Frances Virginia,” as she was publicly known, was the very character of U.S. women’s activism during the Transition Era. Her business and personal concerns for her community intertwined with economics and hospitality. Her caring energy reflected back to her from the community and resulted in 35 years of popularity and success. This is rare in the food service business. Her Frances Virginia Tea Room restaurant exemplifies the breadth and depth of Transition Era social change work.

By offering hospitality and nourishment, this ordinary woman and her tea room supplied emotional, nutritional and financial sustenance to diners, employees and the wider community of visitors to the South. Based on newspaper and partners’ reports of meals served, it has been estimated that the Frances Virginia directly affected nearly 9 million lives during its existence. The Frances Virginia represented safe space and daily bread to the 1-2000 women, children and men who passed through her doors every day, 6 days a week, for 35 years.⁸⁷ This

⁸⁶ Negri, Ed. Oral History, June 20 2011.

⁸⁷ “Two-for-One Plan Tried by Restaurant.” *Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 18 1933, 5A.

Coleman, Mildred Huff. *The South’s Legendary Frances Virginia Tea Room Cookbook*. 25th Anniversary Edition ed.

Nashville, TN: Favorite Recipes Press, 2006. Reprint, 6th printing in 2006.

was pivotal to women's agency, freedom and health. Frances Virginia remains an inspirational model for entrepreneurs, activists, scholars and society today.

This Frances Virginia case study reveals steps she took, similar to thousands of her tea room contemporaries. They provided a socially acceptable space for women outside the home and helped eliminate gendered dining. They welcomed and nourished multiple sexes, ages and classes. It is quite extraordinary that Frances Virginia and her contemporaries performed so many tasks to the degree that they did. The multiplicity, munificence and constancy of these Transition Era women nourished the outrage, courage, and drama of Second Wave Feminists who took the next steps to racially integrate restaurants. In the next section, I discuss activism through the lens of womanism.

Womanism and Home Economics

Focus on Duality

In order to explain Frances Virginia's activist life, we need dual lenses, similar to bifocal glasses, which allow us to see both near and far. The feminist lens gives us the big picture by focusing on systemic and institutional conditions, such as women's exclusion from public life and, by association, restaurants, during the first half of the 20th century. The feminist lens helps us understand the "why" of Frances Virginia's activism. On the other hand, the womanist lens helps us see the "how" of Frances Virginia's activism. The womanist lens focuses on the everyday details that eventually affect and significantly alter society, for example, acts of care and community service. These are often women's traditional spheres of influence and not clearly

seen as transformative operations. Seeing and naming these as womanist acts gives us the detailed picture and helps us understand their importance. In this thesis, I use The Transition Era framework to hold these feminist and womanist lenses in order to see the scenes together—the feminist context, which shaped Frances Virginia’s activism, and womanist context, which magnifies and refigures Frances Virginia’s ostensibly “domestic” labor to a social change orientation.

According to Layli Phillips’ *The Womanist Reader*, “Feminism is that critical perspective and social movement that revolves around eradication of sexism, the dismantling of patriarchy, and elimination of violence against women.”⁸⁸ On the other hand, “Womanism is a social change perspective rooted in Black women’s and other women of color’s everyday experiences and everyday methods of problem solving in everyday spaces, extended to the problem of ending all forms of oppression for all people, restoring the balance between people and the environment/nature, and reconciling human life with the spiritual dimension.”⁸⁹

While womanism is most frequently associated with the cultural, historical, and political experiences of women of color, it can be used to represent the positionality of any group that has experienced class, culture, sex, or other oppression. Along with African American women, Frances Virginia and other white, middle class woman had experienced sex discrimination in education, career, and the use of public spaces like restaurants. Frances Virginia used her tea room to relieve the gender discrimination of white women. Thus, womanism can be used to illuminate her story. By opening a tea room and welcoming all white women as well as men, Frances Virginia addressed and helped solve her female culture’s everyday problem of discrimi-

⁸⁸Layli Phillips, *The Womanist Reader*, ed. Layli Phillips (New York: Routledge, 2006), xxxv.

⁸⁹Ibid., xx.

natory dining, in a way not unlike African American women who ran food service businesses in their communities to address racial discrimination.

In this thesis, I focus on Frances Virginia's hospitality, career, and community service choices through both feminist and womanist lenses. These dual lenses reveal the contrasting elements of her work as a woman, a home economist and as a businesswoman, during her particular historical era, and within her gendered, racially segregated, middle class, Southern culture. Combining the more accessible language and everyday emphasis of womanism with the systemic and institutional perspective of feminism enables me to provide examples that challenge historic images of women and the stereotypes of tea room diners, employees and owners.

Everyday, common sense actions can inform and balance feminist scholarly research. We can begin to see Frances Virginia and her tea room space more clearly. In this age, single vision prescription eyeglasses are no longer adequate for vision.⁹⁰ We need multiple perspectives to imagine a more hospitable future. Like mothers, daughters and in-laws coming together over Frances Virginia Hot Turkey on Eggbread Sandwiches and negotiating over the check,⁹¹ we can begin to comprehend others' perspectives and different operational methods. New insights can inspire new dialogue and facilitate more congenial negotiations between diverse groups today.

⁹⁰ Proverbs 29:18 warns that "without vision, the people perish," a motto Dr. L.N.Huff, my optometrist grandfather used in his optical business and his 1950s campaign for Georgia Public Service Commissioner.

⁹¹ All capitalized recipes are historic, and published in *The South's Legendary Frances Virginia Tea Room Cookbook*, which is listed in the bibliography.

Womanist Values

According to Womanist scholar Layli Maparyan, womanists value hospitality, wellness, harmony, balance, nurturance, memory, mothering, and love. In her book, *The Womanist Idea*, Maparyan argues that womanists use their values as a source of inspiration to initiate social and ecological change. These same values are also foundational to home economics. Both groups understand that these are methodologies for doing public good. This womanist hospitality and nurturance can be intentionally applied as a social change method in any situation; further, the personal desire for harmony or wellness can lead to creative solutions.

For instance, Kiran Bedi's womanist memoir, *It's Always Possible: One Woman's Transformation of Tihar Prison*,⁹² is the story of how she employed her values to transform India's worst prison into an ashram, thus changing the inhabitants' lives for the better. Bedi's improvements included providing better food, beautification of the grounds, and making it possible for inmates to improve their appearance and cleanliness. Frances Virginia's desire to serve nutritious food to the public at affordable prices changed the health of the public she attracted, thus linking her to this womanist change tradition.

In her book, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*, Alice Walker points out that suicidal artist Vincent Van Gogh suffered from lack of models.⁹³ As an African American woman, Walker's experience of personal and universal suffering led to a longing for black, female role models. She devised the term womanist to describe the needed models she envisioned.

⁹² Kiran Bedi, *It's Always Possible: One Woman's Transformation of India's Prison System* (Honesdale, PA: Himalayan Institute Press, 1998).

⁹³ Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, 1983 ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967), 4.

She describes the creative soul and beauty of art in her mother's model of gardening. Walker points out that, "spirituality, which is the base of art"⁹⁴ can be found in women's cooking. I extend this to suggest that both art and spirituality were at the heart of the recipes and menus served at the Frances Virginia. Spiritual and creative arts such as cooking and decorating express joy as well as keep hearts and community alive in times of despair. In this vein, Frances Virginia's celebratory menus and clubroom dining space kept women's friendships alive during The Depression. One diner reminisced, "It [the Frances Virginia Tea Room] was *always* where we went to celebrate engagements, baby showers or birthdays of the people we loved."

Spelman College brochures specifically link these spiritual components to home economics when the curriculum changed from domestic education to home economics education. The brochure describes its purpose as an integration of home *and* community for "the spiritual well being of family members."⁹⁵ While neither used the term womanism, both of these Georgia institutions fueled home economics students' with idealism and activist goals. The professors taught and modeled universal concern for others' mental, physical, economic, emotional and spiritual well being. This is the spirit of womanism and the foundation of womanist social and ecological change methodology.

Fervor and Flesh

It is almost impossible to understand the fervor of home economists' missions, or to judge their tea rooms' intrinsic value, without a womanist lens to identify nurturance, cordiality, cooking, and decor as operational methods, and care and concern as motivations to act.

⁹⁴Ibid., 233.

⁹⁵"Spelman College Announcements for 1927-1928 Catalogue for 1926-1927," 42-43.

Care and concern are not dependent on a particular *religious* belief or institutional dogma. The concept of universal good, of oneness, of ecology between living beings and transcendent energy does more than just *tolerate* others. This compassion for universal good *includes* all races and cultures, and assumes individuals are inseparable from the harmonious whole, inasmuch as gelatin aspics did not just tolerate infusions of vegetables and fruits, but were transformed into harmonious mixtures of memorable *congealed* salads (for example, Waldorf Soufflé Aspic, Fruited Cider Aspic). Illuminating this motivation as an activist methodology enables us to understand the intentionality that accompanied the home economics-facilitated tea room movement. Such thinking infused Frances Virginia's business operations.

Despite this idealistic view, this thesis does not suggest that all of Frances Virginia's actions were spiritually motivated. Nor does it claim that all Frances Virginia diners felt love or compassion for their companions over their Chicken Salad and Tomato Aspic Plates. My claim is simply, that when we use womanism as a lens, we can see how everyday spirituality and values of interpersonal care created methods of gendered social change. Womanism makes a methodology apparent that feminism fails to register. Like womanism itself, tea rooms held the seeds of their own destruction as women evolved and became free to explore new experiences when granted additional civil and dining rights.

The Frances Virginia oral histories flesh out the written resources and offer examples of how womanism can arguably operate outside African American culture. Innumerable diners' stories reflect more than mere nostalgia. Over and over again, after my tea room programs, diners who are now in their 70s or 80s will stand in line, waiting to tell me their stories. Faded blue eyes sparkle as they ecstatically, yet reverently, recount their female rituals. Wrinkled fac-

es beam as they recall intimate associations with beloved grandmothers, aunts, best friends and husbands-to-be over meals at the Frances Virginia Tea Room. The speakers' tone and body language impart an inordinate sense of female connection.

The women, and men, remember what they wore, what they ate, whom they were with, how they felt, how they behaved and the details of the special occasion. These definitive memories are compelling evidence of an out-of-the-ordinary experience over a seemingly ordinary event like eating lunch or supper. For example, today's Jell-O seems ordinary to me. However, viewed through a womanist lens in Transition Era context, it is an out-of-the-ordinary *chilled* concoction. Until inexpensive electric refrigerators replaced *icebox* refrigerators in middle class urban and rural homes, these gourmet congealed/aspic/gelatin, i.e., Jell-O salads, were only available in wealthy homes and private clubs. Access to such delicacies at tea room events ameliorated class differences between individual women as well as between groups of women such as Georgia State College for Women alumnae and Southern Bell telephone operators (who were all females until the 1960s). Every day, country vegetables such as turnip greens and uncommon city dishes such as Deviled Eggplant mingled side-by-side on the Frances Virginia menus and diners' plates like office workers and their bosses at company luncheons or suppers. Seen through a womanist lens, sharing a birthday meal with a beloved grandmother or friend became a female rite of passage, a communion, a nurturing, emotional connection that invoked some heartfelt union or tradition within their encounters. Their Frances Virginia Tea Room experience transmuted the energy of an ordinary working day into a physical long-term memory which could be accessed and re-experienced throughout their lives. In the following chapter, I discuss the methodology for my case study.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY – BUILDING THE CASE STUDY

Methodology

According to Shulamit Reinhartz in *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, the feminist case study is another way of “telling the story of”⁹⁶ someone or some event in order to illustrate a theory or make a particular point about the events, the chronology, the setting, etc. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* by John Creswell adds that case study methodology values use of multiple and diverse sources such as observations, interviews, documents, archival records, and artifacts.⁹⁷ This particular study incorporates feminist and womanist as well as oral history methodologies and subjective personal experience to present the story of Frances Virginia and her Southern tea room during the latter part of First Wave Feminism.

Feminist analysis incorporates categorical or direct interpretations by looking for single or multiple instances as well as patterns that occurred. Feminist analysis integrates issue-relevant meanings, naturalistic generalizations and facts.⁹⁸ While complicated to conduct, these mixed methods and eclectic sources contribute to a more complete, more complex story, particularly in a case study. For example, integrating a biography, oral history, and analysis of Frances Virginia and her tea room helps us deconstruct the relationship of Frances Virginia’s education to her activism. In addition, it clarifies the importance of tea rooms to women in her

⁹⁶ Shulamit Reinhartz, *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 171.

⁹⁷ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1998), 61-3.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 153-4.

gendered era, and brings light to this misunderstood phenomenon within specific years of the by-gone era of First Wave Feminism.

This approach allows me to confront the invisibility of home economists as activists, to challenge historians' assessments of The Transition Era and to demonstrate that women, like Frances Virginia, did more than mere cooking and sewing. Furthermore, by including diners' recollections of their experiences and impressions of Frances Virginia and the Frances Virginia Tea room, I can dispute 21st century feminists' assessments and popular discourse about which might posit women's tea room experiences as insignificant moments.

Feminist Methodology

According to Creswell, feminist scholars see gender as a basic, organizing principle that shapes human consciousness and directs conditions of society, particularly the subordination of women. He adds that feminist methodology aims to produce collaborative, ideological research in order to improve women's visibility and correct distortions in order to challenge and transform women's unequal social position.⁹⁹ Collaborative projects consider each woman's idea of herself, her gender and her personal methods of resisting oppression, rather than trying to present a single unified voice that speaks for all women.

Reinhartz adds that feminist researchers value subjective or embodied knowledge.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, feminists incorporate personal experiences because these are essential for a complete knowledge of any subject. Feminist research seeks to analyze assumptions and reveal a bigger, more inclusive story. I use feminist methodology to illuminate Frances Virginia as a

⁹⁹ Ibid., 83-4.

¹⁰⁰ Reinhartz, *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, 3.

woman who operated within and against the sexist conditions of Transition Era's patriarchal society. In this study, a feminist methodological approach is important to make visible the structural dimensions of The Transition Era as well as to capture women's voices from the era.

Womanist Methodology

In this paper, I argue that Frances Virginia offers us an example of *white, Southern* womanist activism. I base this contention largely on the fact that Frances Virginia used womanist methods of hospitality and care, as well as gendered, do-it-yourself actions to affect and effect change in her community, against the backdrop of social and political conditions that oppressed *white, Southern* women. Notably, women of color have developed and espoused womanism's three foundational methods: self-care, spirituality and harmonization, but the methods are open to all womanists.¹⁰¹ Thus, these concepts enable me, a white, southern womanist, to shed light on the less visible facets of Frances Virginia's work to empower women. These reveal hospitality, nurturance, and wellness to be professional, as well as everyday, methods for social change practitioners.

Unlike the theory and ideology of feminism, womanism is a worldview or a way of seeing and explaining the world which is derived from one's personal experience. Dr. Layli Maparyan's new book, *The Womanist Idea*, helps us understand that womanist perspective goes outside academic rationality and draws on life experience, plus the collective accumulation of an unseen energy of "a heightened, non-rational spiritual state that makes the seemingly impossible possible."¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Layli Maparyan, *The Womanist Idea* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 53, 33.

¹⁰² Ibid., 33.

In this way, womanist social theory aligns with quantum physics theory. Maparyan's book explains that energy, whether spiritual, vibrational, or mechanical, is a power that can affect external conditions and influence political, personal, and environmental conditions in the world.¹⁰³ In comparison, John K. N. Murphy's article, "Quantum Theory and Wave/Particle Duality," points to the fact that quantum researchers address these same energies in physical science research. Physics respects the dichotomy of atoms acting as both waves and particles.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, womanist epistemology is able "to sustain paradox comfortably... to respect different truths and the people who hold them simultaneously."¹⁰⁵ This is useful when analyzing the employment dualities of the upstairs tea room and the street level tray shop. Womanist logic, where context matters equally with other factors, enables us to see a dichotomy, but also the truth, in Frances Virginia's opinion that she *welcomed everyone*, yet according to reports, she never served African Americans, except in the kitchen.

A womanist world view facilitates awareness and validation of unseen energetic factors such as: (1) how Frances Virginia's understanding of home economics/dietetics and hospitality permeated her career and foodservice practices, (2) why mother-daughter and/or intergenerational interchanges and relationships became significant memories, (3) how the tea room food and space represented womanist ideals of "wholeness, wellness, and dynamic interfunctionality"¹⁰⁶ for her diners and the South as a whole.

While traditional womanists focus on the home and kitchen table as a center of action, this thesis enables us to see the tea room's commercial kitchen and dining room as places of

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ John Murphy, "Quantum Theory and Wave/Particle Duality," John K. N. Murphy, www.hotquanta.com/wpd.html.

¹⁰⁵ Maparyan, *The Womanist Idea*, 40.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 52-3.

self-awareness and personal connection to the greater world. This would include spiritual, mental, emotional, physical, material, social, and environmental energies that affect the oneness of the universe. For example, sitting down with a bite of Frances Virginia's baked Apple Crisp would be a womanist method for women's studies students, feminists, home economics/family and consumer sciences to deal with the misunderstandings about their similar goals.

A Multi-Methods Case Study

Feminists employ mixed methods to present the person(s), the events, the chronology, and the setting. Feminist analysis incorporates categorical or direct interpretations by looking for single or multiple instances as well as patterns that occurred. According to John Creswell in *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*, feminist analysis integrates issue-relevant meanings, naturalistic generalizations, and facts.¹⁰⁷ Feminist case study methodology values using multiple, as well as, diverse sources such as observations, interviews, documents, archival records, and artifacts.¹⁰⁸ While complicated to conduct, these mixed methods and eclectic sources contribute to a more complete, more complex story. This is true in the case of Frances Virginia, where oral stories and archival materials were a prime resource and provided information about how the participants saw themselves and their lives.

Oral History: Interviews and Conversations

By Word of Mouth by Anthony Seldon and Joanna Pappworth loosely defines 'oral history' as "information transmitted orally, in a personal exchange, of a kind likely to be of historical or long-term value.... primary source material obtained ... of persons deemed to harbor hitherto

¹⁰⁷ Creswell, John W. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1998.153-4

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.,61-3

unavailable information worth preserving."¹⁰⁹ Sections in Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai's book, *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, reveal that women's oral history can be a feminist encounter, even if the interviewee is not a feminist. Because oral history interviews facilitate conversation, they have the potential for participants to re-envision and align themselves with feminist ideology according to their own definition.¹¹⁰ Thus, all feminist research projects, including this one, are potentially externally and/or internally life changing. They empower both the interviewee and the researcher, especially if there are generational, or other differences, which provide fertile soil for thoughtful communication and growth.

My son, Nick Coleman, expressed this poetically when thinking about his grandmother. At age 14, he seriously questioned, "Mom, what good are *old* people, like Grandma? They can't run or work hard; all they can do is sit and talk." Learning about oral history methodology at age 29, he laughed, "Now I get it. Your mind wraps presents that you can open later in life." He continued, "As you mature, you can sit and talk about your memories. They're gifts, surprises, and truths that you didn't understand when you were younger. I learned a lot from Grandma's old timey stories."

I received these womanist gifts when I began interviewing people for this thesis. Following thesis committee members Drs. Kuhn and Nickols' advice, I employed a collaborative strategy of open-ended questions and story swapping. I conducted these 1-2 hour formal and informal conversations to flesh out accounts in historical newspaper articles and books. This system triggered memories not mentioned in traditional texts and elaborated on Atlanta history. We

¹⁰⁹ Anthony Seldon and Joanna Pappworth, *By Word of Mouth: 'Elite' Oral History* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1983), 4.

¹¹⁰ Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 74.

aligned as colleagues, tea room sisters and brothers, as we laughed over stories. For instance, by comparing the 1930s and 1950s, the two of us learned how women learned to tip.

My method is more accurately *womanist* oral history, because women talking and sharing their memories are powerful womanist traditions. Layli Maparyan defines dialogue as care when people take the time to connect by listening to one another. She elaborates on this womanist notion as “The power of the word.”¹¹¹ Moreover, women’s storytelling is arguably the oldest method of education and research. Long before alphabets or written records, women’s conversations, everyday gossip and stories educated and influenced others. For me, as an outgoing feminist and womanist person, gathering memories and stories is an ideal, interpersonal methodology. It is a congenial opportunity to think deeply, in retrospect, about the Frances Virginia case and gendered, embodied experiences with women who may or may not be my age, race, culture, or political affiliation.

In the following sections, I describe the materials that were used to construct this analysis of Frances Virginia and her tea room. These include my own and others’ subjective personal experiences and memories, artifacts and archival materials.

Subjective Personal Experience

So-called objective oral historians can only be objective if they make the interviewee into an object or other, without disclosing bias, responding with anything personal or comparing insights.¹¹² According to Shulamit Reinhartz in *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, feminist research is different because subjectivity and personal experience are essential com-

¹¹¹ Maparyan, *The Womanist Idea*, 58-60.

¹¹² Eva M. McMahan and Kim Lacy Rogers, eds., *Interactive Oral History Interviewing* (New Jersey Hove, UK: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1994), 63-67.

ponents, required to form a more complete base of knowledge.¹¹³ Thus, as a feminist researcher, it is important for me to record and document women's history by including my own experiences and insights as a woman who experienced the history about which I write.

This study includes my own memories as data. I ate at the Frances Virginia with friends and/or family until I was 18, when it closed. As such, I have direct knowledge about the crunch of the fried chicken, the twinkle in the muffin maker's eye, and how my arthritic grandmother stood taller and strutted without her cane when the elevator man announced, "Third floor, Frances Virginia Tea Room."¹¹⁴ While my memories about the tea room and The Transition Era are subjective perspectives, they are factors unknown to other researchers who did not study home economics, know the tea room partners, or perceive the realities of gender segregated dining.

Cultural Materials: Trash or Treasure

I started with a huge box of "junk" and papers. One colleague disparaged my references to this informal archive. However, womanist scholars value the cast-offs and relics of ordinary, modern day-to-day female living just like anthropologists and preservationists honor and evaluate the pottery found in trash heaps of the past. Katherine Wilson, a Georgia State University history professor, terms my Frances Virginia collection "cultural materials," the valuable stuff of a specific, female culture.¹¹⁵ Thus, I cite my ongoing assortment of one-of-a-kind artifacts as, "Coleman Cultural Materials." This collection includes menus, copies of photos and legal contracts; dishes, kitchen equipment, furniture, drapery fabric and decorative items; historic cloth-

¹¹³ Reinhartz, *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, 3.

¹¹⁴ Mildred Huff Coleman, "The Elevator," in *The Frances Virginia Tea Room Cookbook* (Atlanta: Peachtree Publishers, 1981).

¹¹⁵ Kathryn Wilson, personal communication on cultural materials, GA State University, Fall semester 2009.

ing and hats; Georgia and South Carolina collegiate yearbooks and home economics texts, home economists' employment and professional associations' projects and records.

Over my lifetime, I have spoken with thousands of people: tea room partners, employees, diners, relatives, and home economists. The data from these conversations is only in my head. Since it was never written down, it can only be utilized through my recollection. Due to the volume of these memories and papers, and especially when I do not have specific names or dates, I refer to these recollections, unpublished notes, and stories as "Coleman-Family Personal Collection." I also have boxes containing my maternal great-great grandmother's Civil War letters, plus drafts of my grandmother's books, newspaper articles on history, features, and society, which provide 18th to 20th century insight and context to The Transition Era newspaper archives that I have accessed.

Of course, there are the recipes so central to the tea room's reputation and success; there are hundreds, hand written in my aunt's kitchen notebook. In 1981, we selected the most popular ones and published them in my book, *The Frances Virginia Tea Room Cookbook*,¹¹⁶ which I amplified as *The South's Legendary Frances Virginia Tea Room Cookbook*.¹¹⁷ In this thesis, where I sometimes refer to recipes, I capitalize the Frances Virginia recipes, since they are discussed in these books.

Special Archives

In addition to traditional books and journal articles about Atlanta, the tea room movement, and women's history, I developed this case with on-line historical newspaper accounts

¹¹⁶ Mildred Huff Coleman, *The Frances Virginia Tea Room Cookbook*, first ed. (Atlanta: Peachtree Publishers, 1981).

¹¹⁷ ———, *The South's Legendary Frances Virginia Tea Room Cookbook*, 25th Anniversary Edition ed. (Nashville, TN: Favorite Recipes Press, 2006; reprint, 6th printing in 2006).

about the Wikle family, Frances Virginia Tea Room news and advertisements. Information about home economics came from the Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library at The University of Georgia; archivists' stories and archival collections at Wesleyan, Agnes Scott and Spelman Colleges in Georgia; and archives in The HEARTH digital collection of *the Journal of Home Economics* at the Mann Library and the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (AAFCS) in the Kroch Library at Cornell University. The Pullen Library, Special Collections Department, Georgia State University, had huge collections of useful Atlanta photographs as well as pictures inside the Frances Virginia Tea Room and The Varsity restaurant. The Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center had photos as well as Atlanta restaurant files and menus. Some of these photos appear in the Appendix of this thesis.

Interviews

I have oral recollections from my own 25+ family members with Frances Virginia experiences. In addition, as a tea room speaker for more years than the Frances Virginia actually operated, I have collected memories and had conversations from what feels like as many people as ate there. For example, a February 1998, *Southern Living Magazine* article, "In the Spotlight," elicited 1000+ phone calls and written responses. This was just one of countless stories and/or Frances Virginia recipes featured on national and local TV/radio and print media, plus presentations to organizations as varied as The World Tea Expo, The American Oriental Express Train's Southern tours, The Southern Foodways Alliance Conference, South Eastern Women's Studies Association and local civic groups.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ See www.southernfoodmillie.com for examples of other appearances.

Most of these conversations were neither fully notated nor in-depth, and are lumped in to the category, “Coleman-Family Personal Collection.” Since so many of the stories are alike, occasionally I present them as a single voice. Although highly unconventional, to avoid interrupting the flow of the thesis, I do not footnote every story. When there is no specific citation, the reader can assume it is from the stories and notes in my Coleman-Family Collection.

I conducted formal interviews once I began to consider Frances Virginia and her tea room as a serious graduate study project. These interviews include a telephone conversation with Frances Virginia’s son, Toxey Whitaker Jr. just before his death; face-to-face and follow up telephone interviews with Frances Virginia’s great nieces Margie Kemp Burleigh and Sally Kemp Baker; other partners’ descendants – nephew Albert Goodgame*, niece Nancy Nance and her brother, George King; employees Magnolia Browning and Helen Paris; retired Atlanta restaurateur Ed Negri*, owner of Herren’s, a male oriented restaurant near the Frances Virginia tea room; Atlanta historians Gretchen Maclachan and Cliff Kuhn; Piedmont Hospital Archivist Diane Erdlejac; native Atlanta diners Lynda Huff Cagle*, Betty Smith and Margaret Mitchell’s nephew, Joe Mitchell. (The asterisks * indicate recorded interviews.).

Because of the eclectic manner in which I collected all these oral histories, I have slightly varied from traditional format within the bibliography. Collectively, the diverse sources and methods have allowed me to provide a rich picture of Frances Virginia Wickle Whitaker, the Frances Virginia tea room, and the Transition Era, in order to make my case that Frances Virginia embodied an important, yet understudied, model of womanist activism at a time when women’s activism was largely overlooked or downplayed.

Re-imagining the Tea Room as a Case Study

In this section I overview literature on tea rooms in the United States, in order to set the stage for understanding the significance of the Frances Virginia Tea room. On a grand scale, centuries of study have produced countless books and articles on tea: oriental discovery myths, tea drinking customs, cultivation, analyses of local and international politics as tea traveled from the East, via France and England, to the United States.¹¹⁹ Bhattacharjee's *Culture in a Teacup*; Heiss and Lisick's *The Story of Tea*; Campbell's *The Tea Book*; and *My Mother Loved Tea: The Story of Ruth Bigelow and How She Changed the Way Americans Enjoy Tea*, represent a few modern examples that provide general background for my project. Alongside this research, there are hundreds of current scholars writing about 'food and women.' However, the field narrows considerably when the search is strictly defined and limited to females, food, tea, and the activist tea room phenomenon. Undervalued and described as 'merely women's history,' there was almost no *written* scholarship on the subject of women and the tea *rooms* until the 1990s.

However, there are some oral histories. In the 1980s, while attending a Revolutionary War Re-enactment in Charleston, I listened to *oral* accounts about Revolutionary War era parlors and kitchens as females' spaces for tea and activism. The female performers cited Charleston women's stories and unpublished letters that linked female tea drinking with American

¹¹⁹ Saunam Bhattacharjee, Mary Lou Heiss, and Thomas D. Lisicki, "Culture in a Teacup: A Celebration of Tea, the World's Oldest Beverage," in *International Association of Culinary Professionals: 30th Annual Conference April 15-9, 2008* (New Orleans, LA: Mary Lou Heiss c2008, 2008)

Mary Lou Heiss and Robert J. Heiss, *The Story of Tea: A Cultural History and Drinking Guide* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2007)

Dawn L. Campbell, *The Tea Book* (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company, 1995), David C. Bigelow, *My Mother Loved Tea: The Story of Ruth Bigelow and How She Changed the Way Americans Enjoy Tea* (Canada: Benjamin Press, 2008; reprint, Reprinted 2009).

men's political activism in the 1700s. The docent's accounts of South Carolina ladies' *anti*- tea drinking parties in homes would be lost without such oral accounts, since library and online searches produced no texts to verify this. Nevertheless, the docent's stories reveal Southern American females as activists alongside their Boston tea-partying brothers during the American Revolution. This history introduces us to the origins of, and rationale for, the colonial themes and décor that pervaded early 1900s tea rooms, including Atlanta's Frances Virginia Tea Room. Colonial themes of rebellion and independence were idealized models for female tea room entrepreneurs as well as their boyishly bobbed, co-ed patrons.

Although there is little information about why tea rooms came to be called tea rooms, Jessica Sewell's article, "Tea and Suffrage," specifies some early links to women's tea drinking, although not tea *rooms* per se, with the American First Wave Feminist movement.¹²⁰ A recent Public Broadcasting documentary, *Not for Ourselves Alone: The Story of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*, briefly alludes to home parlors and kitchens as spaces where American leaders, such as Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, met over cups of tea to strategize their plans for female voting rights in the early 1800s.¹²¹

In 1996 tea *room* history and analysis as *European* female history is notably detailed in *Tea and Taste: The Glasgow Tea Rooms 1875-1975*, which describes the historic rise and fall of Cranston's Scottish tea room empire.¹²² The Cranston tea room experience offers a glimpse of the prelude to American tea rooms. However, this work does not specifically compare them or analyze Cranston's operation from a feminist theoretical perspective.

¹²⁰ Sewell, Jessica. "Tea and Suffrage." *Food, Culture & Society* 11, no. 4 (Dec. 2008).21.

¹²¹ Ken Burns and Paul Barnes, *Not for Ourselves Alone: The Story of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony* (Atlanta: PBS: WETA, 1999).

¹²² Perilla Kinchin, *Tea and Taste: The Glasgow Tea Rooms 1875-1975* (Oxford: White Cockade Publishing, 1996).

A reading of the Harvey K. Newman's book, *Southern Hospitality* offers a second, plausible explanation for tea room invisibility and the lack of earlier texts on American tea room history. Newman cites Fred Houser's article, "Where Do We Eat," which mentions that In the 1920s Atlanta tea rooms were erroneously absorbed into, and considered to be a type of, lunchroom that served simple, inexpensive food, quickly.¹²³

I begin the next section by briefly discussing the history and evolution of tea rooms, followed by a consideration of scholarship on 20th century tea rooms. Finally, I will examine the link between tea rooms and the emerging field of home economics that provided a foundation for tea rooms as social change activism.

Tea Rooms in the 20th Century

First Wave women's history and women's tea rooms as a viable industry were both undervalued for decades. As a result, the tea room movement, as well as most female culinary history, was almost invisible. For no documented reasons, there was a sudden, explosive burst of culinary research akin to the effects of the concurrent invention of electric bread-making machines and rapid rise yeast. This research distinguished tea rooms as a category deserving of study. This new scholarship was often termed *foodways* to indicate it was more comprehensive than previous food writing and to disassociate it from "mere" *recipe writing*.

Scholars from multiple fields entered the conversation, researching culinary history, and food service operations from their particular standpoints. One author is Richard Pillsbury, professor of geography at Georgia State University. A public speaker and inventor of "the grits line"

¹²³ Fred Houser, "Where Do We Eat?," *City Builder* 1929.

geographical map of southern culture in a speech for the Southern Foodways Alliance, Pillsbury described the *social* geography of 21st century public food service in his book, *From Boarding House to Bistro*. However, Pillsbury primarily discussed male-operated businesses catering to majority male customers. Like most authors, who might dutifully note race or ethnicity, he omitted gender references, female food service pioneers, and female diners.¹²⁴

Two scholars pioneered tea room literature that directly relates to my project. In 1995, Cynthia Brandimarte, a cultural materials scholar from Texas State University who also directs the Texas State Parks historical program, pioneered the geography and social history of the American tea room movement as a women's phenomenon in her illustrated article, "To Make the World Homelike: Gender Space and America's Tea Room Movement."¹²⁵ Brandimarte examined how women moved from private home life into public space via tea rooms. She observed that entrepreneurial young singles, widows or married woman pushed against societal restrictions and merged the boundaries of upper-class parlors and working class kitchens into tea room spaces for multiple classes. They first operated commercial dining facilities within their homes then established "home-like restaurants" called tea rooms. From there, they successfully moved into larger commercial spaces and the greater public sphere. Brandimarte points out that having socially acceptable, non-religious, public places to meet enabled multiple classes of women to discuss personal and social activist topics.

Brandimarte highlights how the early female home economics movement facilitated the female tea room movement as women received collegiate training in quantity food prepara-

¹²⁴ Pillsbury, Richard. *From Boarding House to Bistro: The American Restaurant Then and Now*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990.

¹²⁵ Cynthia A Brandimarte, "To Make the Whole World Homelike: Gender Space and America's Tea Room Movement," *Winterthur Portfolio* 30, no. 1 Spring (1995).

tion, nutrition, and management, plus practical business experience via home economics labs, i.e., campus “tea rooms.” This home economics training enabled women, such as Helen Corbitt in the 1950s, eventually to become recognized as full-fledged restaurateurs. A lack of literature reveals that most early home economists, like Atlanta’s Frances Virginia, never received this recognition.

In 2002, Jan Whitaker followed Brandimarte’s scholarly work with a popular book, *Tea at the Blue Lantern Inn*. Whitaker, an independent scholar and culinary historian from New England, continues to research aspects of female foodways, writing, and blogging about tea rooms’ gendered history, race, and biography. Whitaker continues to explore aspects of the American tea room’s history and female food service. Whitaker clearly spotlights images and their historical context noting the “profound changes in women’s role in American society...[beginning] when women dressed in long, restrictive clothing... had no vote, were unable to travel freely or go many places alone.”

Brandimarte and Whitaker’s works cite early 1900s home economics journals, tea room management, and historic ladies magazine¹²⁶ articles, such as “How to Run a Successful Tea Room.” *The Newnan Times-Herald* Food Editor, Angela McRae, provided rare correspondence and booklets from a 1927 New York series, “The Ware School of Tea Room, Cafeteria and Motor Inn Management.”

While Brandimarte and Whitaker link tea room history with female home economics, two other women, namely Sarah Stage and Virginia B. Vincenti, link home economics with women’s studies, co-editing a 1997 book, *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History*

¹²⁶ Until more politically correct terminology developed, *ladies* was a socially-correct, proper, honorable term for women and their magazines, clothing, opinions, etc.

of a Profession. Stage and Vincenti clearly place home economics in the context of feminist theory and history, highlighting multiple professional home economics career paths, biographies and examples. They point to the home economics social activist model and dietetics programs taught when early tea room entrepreneurs, like Frances Virginia, matriculated in the early 1900s. In 1909 the home economics profession's mission statement indicated that founders' idea of "home" was not limited to house walls.

Although UGA is not Frances Virginia's alma mater, *The History of Home Economics at the University of Georgia* by Jessie J. Mize,¹²⁷ adds a localized perspective about collegiate home economics education and its mission for tea room food service administration. This augments home economics data from archivists at Spelman College in Atlanta and provided another comparison to Wesleyan College, where Frances Virginia spent her freshman year.¹²⁸

All of these sources reveal parallels between the rhetoric of the 1800s Industrialization Era, 1900s Progressive Era education and women's home economics, especially dietetics, as a socially appropriate female food service career during this historical period. They demonstrate how professional home economics was established during The First Wave of the feminist movement, expanded until the 1960s after which time it dwindled, because women achieved more freedom in the public space and educational institutions.¹²⁹ This research counters derog-

¹²⁷ Mize, Jessie J. *The History of Home Economics at the University of Georgia*. Athens: Agee Publishers, Inc, 1983.

¹²⁸ Spencer, Taronda, Archivist. Telephone conversation on Home Economics at Spelman, Aug. 03, 2011.

McNeil, Sybil, Archivist. Telephone conversation on home economics at Wesleyan, Aug. 4, 2011.

¹²⁹ Like feminist/women's/gender studies, home economics has evolved. Today it is variously termed: Family and Consumer Sciences, Community Nutrition and Human Ecology. This more clearly reflects the profession's 21st century academic and activist social objectives.

atory critiques of home economics and enables scholars to appreciate how home economics relates to current women's studies' activist objectives.

While female liberal arts institutions had earlier dismissed home economics to the "ag hill" campuses of land grant institutions, following the 1960s women's movement, other female liberal arts institutions, for instance, Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia, did away with their home economics programs altogether. However, as Second Wave progressed, there was a major turn-around in one traditionally female school, where previously, women's recipes were not considered worthy academic subjects. In the 1970s, Barbara Haber dared to establish a cookbook collection at Harvard University's Radcliff Institute for Advanced Studies. Many feminists and women's studies scholars were against this unseemly, non-professional idea. Times have changed. Haber and co-editor Arlene Avakian survey these protests and changes in their book, *From Betty Crocker to Feminist Food Studies: Critical Perspectives on Women and Food*.¹³⁰ Chapters offer examples of women's public representations and activist resistances in connection with food, a field now upheld as food studies, culinary history, or foodways, by those disciplines outside the field of home economics. This work provides a bridge to consider tea rooms as activist spaces and to link home economics to women's studies.

Jan Whitaker, the previously mentioned tea room scholar, expertly shows up again with the only source I found on African American tea rooms, saying that although she had found a few, African American women more often served tea in private homes than in public facilities termed tea rooms. Whitaker also has a chapter in *From Betty Crocker to Feminist Food Studies*, edited by Arlene Voski Avakian and Barbara Haber, "Domesticating the Restaurant: Marketing

¹³⁰ Avakian, Arlene Voski, and Barbara Haber. *From Betty Crocker to Feminist Food Studies: Critical Perspectives on Women and Food*. Amherst & Boston: University of Massachusetts, 2005.

the Anglo-American Home.”¹³¹ Silently honoring home economics education and home economists, this section demonstrates the necessity for females to acquire more than home cooking skills to ensure restaurant and tea room profitability. Just as it takes more than academic skill to implement a successful social change endeavor today, Avakian’s critical history offers a path to recover and acknowledge Frances Virginia’s professional home economics grounding and business practices as valid preparation and feminist/womanist methods to transform society and ecology.

Atlanta Connections

There are arguably thousands of authors who can help us comprehend Frances Virginia within the context of Atlanta history. I used the works below to contextualize her as a home economist operating within Atlanta’s social movements and business environment. This thesis format does not allow for an exhaustive historical review of the groups and issues that affected her tea room business. However, those who are interested in a more comprehensive historical perspective may want to access the following resources. Georgina Hickey’s *Hope and Danger in the New South City* describes women’s class issues and the rise in female professions.¹³² Harvey K Newman’s book, *Southern Hospitality: Tourism and the Growth of Atlanta*, provides the business mentality and context of Frances Virginia’s environs.¹³³ Susan Neill and Staci Catron-Sullivan’s *Women in Atlanta*¹³⁴ contains statistical text regarding the high numbers of working

¹³¹ Jan Whitaker, "African-American Tea Rooms," Jan Whitaker, www.janwhitaker.com
Whitaker, "Domesticating the Restaurant," in *From Betty Crocker to Feminist Food Studies*, ed. Arlene Voski Avakian and Barbara Haber (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005).

¹³² Hickey, Georgina. *Hope and Danger in the New South City*. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2003.

¹³³ Newman, Harvey K. *Southern Hospitality: Tourism and the Growth of Atlanta*. Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1999.

¹³⁴ Neill, Susan, and Staci Catron-Sullivan. *Women in Atlanta*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2005.

women in Atlanta, up to 40% in the 1930s, which correlates with the large number of women I interviewed who said they worked during the Frances Virginia era. Period photographs help us imagine their work and home lives while wearing restrictive undergarments, dresses, hats, and gloves. These early 20th century histories depict Atlanta as a city “experiencing chaotic growth” with residents, especially women, negotiating “new social boundaries during a period of rapid urban development.”¹³⁵

As a culinary herstorian, I believe food and foodways notes are essential for any inclusive social history. I find that few traditional authors appreciate that diet or foodways are key words, worthy of listing in the index. However, “Food and diet” are indexed in *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948*.¹³⁶ Kuhn’s oral histories about World War II sugar and meat rationing at home enabled me to link a newspaper account about Frances Virginia’s restaurant association members reducing the sugar in their large scale recipes.

A deconstruction of Frances Virginia recipes reveals how important a home economics background was to maintain the nutritional integrity of her recipes during WWII, as well as the Depression, when she asserted that she did not want to lower her standards.¹³⁷ Despite substituting oleomargarine for butter, a wartime fat concoction that some believed was inferior to butter, if one makes and tastes the Frances Virginia “war pies” and casseroles, it is apparent that the tea room managed very well. These sources are comparative examples of how Atlantans of multiple classes and Frances Virginia, as a dietitian, home economist and business own-

¹³⁵ Hickey, Georgina. *Hope and Danger in the New South City*. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2003.2.

¹³⁶ Kuhn, Clifford M., Fernard West, and Harlon E. Joye. *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948*. Atlanta; Athens: The University of Georgia Press in conjunction with The Atlanta Historical Society, 1990. 394.

¹³⁷ Advertisement. “Thrift Tickets Have Expired: Display Ad 4-1933-Nov.16 ” *The Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 16 1933. Coleman, Mildred Huff. *The South’s Legendary Frances Virginia Tea Room Cookbook*. 25th Anniversary Edition ed. Nashville, TN: Favorite Recipes Press, 2006. Reprint, 6th printing in 2006.

er, dealt with food shortages.

Herren's: An Atlanta Landmark Past, Present and Future along with long interviews with Negri, provided an Atlanta male's restaurant story for comparison to the female Frances Virginia. Herren's, like the Frances Virginia, was a long time Atlanta favorite, until 1987, when it became insolvent. Announcement of closure, last paychecks and a bag of leftover groceries were issued to employees all at the same time.¹³⁸ In contrast, when the Frances Virginia closed, the last partners had already negotiated employment contracts for the longtime chef and a cadre of waitresses in other food service operations.¹³⁹

Dorothy Sue Cobble offers statistics on U. S. conditions and situations for waitresses in *"Drawing the Line": The Construction of a Gendered Work Force in the Food Service Industry and Dishing it Out: Waitresses and Their Unions in the Twentieth Century*, which specifically notes 1920s African American female servers' acceptability in Southern tea room settings.¹⁴⁰ Conversations with Gretchen Maclachlan and her dissertation, "Women's Work: Atlanta's Industrialization and Urbanization" describe women working in the candy business a few blocks down the street from the Frances Virginia. They may have supplied sweets for the tea room and would have been close enough to have an occasional lunch there.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Negri, Ed, and Michael J. Cain. *Herren's an Atlanta Landmark: Past, Present and Future*. Roswell: Roswell Publishing Company, 2005.168.

Negri, Ed. Oral History, taped June 20 2011.

¹³⁹ Goodgame, Albert, conversations. 1995-ongoing.

¹⁴⁰ Cobble, Dorothy Sue. ""Drawing the Line":The Construction of a Gendered Work Force in the Food Service Industry." In *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor*, edited by Ava Baron, 385. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.

Cobble, Dorothy Sue. *Dishing It Out: Waitresses and Their Unions in the Twentieth Century*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991.23-4.

¹⁴¹ Maclachlan, Gretchen. "Women's Work: Atlanta's Industrialization and Urbanization, 1897-1929." Atlanta: Emory University, 2009.

Maclachlan, Gretchen. 11-09-09 in person, 10-19-09 telephone, 2009.

CHAPTER THREE: AN ANALYSIS OF FRANCES VIRGINIA'S TEA ROOM AS A SITE OF ACTIVISM

Gender and Activism at Work

Just as social environments were segregated by gender, so too were many work environments. During The Transition Era, roughly 1920-60, U.S. law allowed gender discrimination, gender segregation and gender restrictions. Communities' social codes strictly enforced gender segregation in *women's fields* like home economics. For instance, until laws were changed during Third Wave Feminism and the Civil Rights era, *Chefs* were men, while *Nutritionists* and *Dietitians*, like Frances Virginia, were women. Even with advanced degrees, these women were customarily paid less than the equivalent male's position¹⁴² and received different training than their male counterparts. Women learned culinary skills at home, in the cookery schools run by women, or in their female high and college home economics programs. They could specialize in foods and nutrition, or institutional management in collegiate programs and go on to advanced programs as well as dietetic internships, like Frances Virginia did. Even with its inherent gender stipulations and career restrictions, the designations *Home Economist* or *Dietitian*, were especially valuable. This titles enabled women to advance beyond service jobs to administrative positions over other women and receive higher salaries than teachers, Yet, because of gender discrimination, these had glass ceilings too.

¹⁴² Julia Child broke European and American male gender barriers in the 1960s when she persuaded misogynistic administrators to admit her to the men's classes in The Le Cordon Bleu in Paris. She received the certificate and designated herself "The French Chef." Glenn Mack, Oct. 30 2009.

When I attended the University of Georgia School of Home Economics in the 1960s, none of the male professors designated themselves as home economists. The derogatory female stereotype did not effectively change for men until the profession was reorganized as Family and Consumer Sciences a decade later. For more history about this reorganization, see "From Home Economics to Human Ecology: A One-Hundred Year History at the University Wisconsin-Madison," University of Wisconsin-Madison, <http://www.sohe.wisc.edu/depts/history/depts/foods.htm>.

Women could be forced to quit when they married; got pregnant, or had children; if they worked in the same company as their husbands; or if the administration simply decided, “Despite your higher credentials, we’d rather have *a man* in this position.”¹⁴³ During The Transition Era, even highly trained women almost never advanced into positions that supervised or taught adult men.

“Dietitian” was more than a cook or a service job. It was operationally synonymous with today’s “Executive Chef.” For example, Liz Cipro currently reigns as Executive Chef over Atlanta’s Legendary Events catering services. Cipro is the chief “who oversees all aspects of the culinary department including menu design, daily kitchen operations, food preparation and purchasing.”¹⁴⁴ According to newspaper reports, this is what Frances Virginia did as Piedmont Hospital’s Dietitian and in her tea room.¹⁴⁵ Chef’s culinary training, while highly reputable, remains a technical or artistic education, without organic chemistry, nutrition, health, or disease prevention components, unlike dietetics.¹⁴⁶

The American Dietetic Association (ADA) was founded in 1917, the year Frances Virginia graduated. As an active, long-term member, Frances Virginia was grounded in management skills as well as the ADA mission, “committed to improving the nation's health and advancing the profession of dietetics through research, education and advocacy.”¹⁴⁷ With these ADA goals in mind, at age 32 Frances Virginia took a risk as a single woman by establishing a business where she would use her training to further these goals in a manner she directed. As *the boss*,

¹⁴³ This happened to my grandmother as a teacher in the early 1900s and to me as a home economist in 1968.

¹⁴⁴ Elizabeth McDonald, “Liz Cipro Named a Legendary Event’s Executive Chef,” (Atlanta: Atlanta Les Dames d’Escoffier International: summer e-news <lizzie@mcdonald-media.com>, 2011).

¹⁴⁵ Perkeson, M.F. “Atlanta Doctors Build Ideal Hospital.” *The Atlanta Journal*, December 24 1922.9.

¹⁴⁶ Mack, Glenn, conversations, culinary history. Oct. 30 2009.

¹⁴⁷ “Eat Right: American Dietetic Association.” American Dietetic Association, <http://www.eatright.org/About/content.aspx?id=5974>.

she sidestepped gendered ceilings that were ordained by social custom, supervising male, as well as female, employees, and continuing to work when married and mothering a son. These privileges were highly unusual for women in her era.

Food Service as Female Activism

The womanist lens reveals that the Frances Virginia Tea Room exemplifies the larger movement for female independence that Jan Whitaker details in *Tea at the Blue Lantern Inn*¹⁴⁸ where tea rooms were characteristically as wildly diverse as the women who ran them, but were primarily initiated by and for women. This national phenomenon opened public space for women, according to Cynthia Brandimarte, in "To Make the Whole World Homelike,"¹⁴⁹ but examining oral history details in the case of the Frances Virginia Tea Room verifies how Frances Virginia's business exemplifies this as a form of a female hospitality in the South. Each Frances Virginia diner's account humanizes and enlarges the statistical story, provided by author Harvey Newman's male viewpoint about Atlanta's business community, in *Southern Hospitality: Tourism and the Growth of Atlanta*.

According to Newman, the Atlanta Convention Bureau brought 2,410 conventions to the city during its first eleven years. There were tourists from urban and rural communities all over the world. Only a few restaurants had table service and private clubs were not open to tourists, so visitors would have to be fed in the 372 public eating-places, of which most were small Southern food lunchrooms such as the Frances Virginia. Along with tourists, these guests included women from the National Federation of Women's Clubs, University of Georgia, wives of

¹⁴⁸ Jan Whitaker, *Tea at the Blue Lantern Inn: A Social History of the Tea Room Craze in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002).

¹⁴⁹ Brandimarte, "To Make the Whole World Homelike: Gender Space and America's Tea Room Movement."

members and more than a few male members of the Shriners, Rotary International, the National Association of Automobile Manufacturers, the Protective Order of Elks, Southern Baptists and Georgia Tech.¹⁵⁰ The Frances Virginia Tea Room's menus, text and drawings welcomed tourists and familiarized them with southern culture and Atlanta history while they waited for service. According to one Atlanta native:

In Atlanta back then, you were probably either long time Scots-Irish-English white or African black. Our ethnic groups were Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians and Episcopalians, a few Jews and a few Catholics. And we mostly ate the same food: fried chicken, turnip greens, sweet potatoes... what they call soul food today. So we had to educate visitors to put butter on grits and appreciate cornbread that didn't taste like dessert.

A Jewish diner reminded me that, "We were not welcome in many restaurants and [were] totally excluded from membership in most private, "white" clubs [i.e., no ethnics or Blacks allowed]. The Frances Virginia became *our* place."

Jewish merchants from the women's fashion departments at nearby Regenstein's and J.P. Allen's reciprocated the Frances Virginia hospitality by wheeling racks of chic clothes down the sidewalk during the tea room afternoon closure at 3:00 PM. The partners hurriedly shed hostess garb and dietetic uniforms in their miniscule office, trying on dark woolen skirts, dresses and silky polyester blouses for daytime work and evening events before having to re-dress and tend to business again at 5:00.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Newman, Harvey K. *Southern Hospitality: Tourism and the Growth of Atlanta*. Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1999.80,95,97.

¹⁵¹ Albert Goodgame, 1995-ongoing.

The sense of the Frances Virginia Tea Room as part of the hospitable South was emphasized on 1940s and 1950s menu covers which proclaim Atlanta as a city, “Where Interest Abounds.”¹⁵² Frances Virginia’s silhouette on the front cover greets diners while the back cover lists Atlanta museums, archives, parks, the state capitol, plus schools and historical homes, as examples of Southern culture and sites that tourists should visit. The table placemat was termed a Georgia *Place* mat. This placemat highlighted places and products specific to Georgia’s 1950s culture and industry, particularly agricultural products like pecans, peaches, sweet potatoes, pork, poultry and shrimp. Frances Virginia recipes featured these state grown products rather than exotic imports.¹⁵³ Using local products in their harvest season was a common home economics-instilled practice. This ideology and practice links Frances Virginia to modern social change activists like Alice Waters, Alice Walker, and others, who are involved in ecology, farm to table, locavore and green table movements that promote *global sustainability*.¹⁵⁴

As a food service administrator who was also a dietetics association member, choosing this Georgia product and *place* mat was more than an advertising gimmick. Frances Virginia embedded sustainability and health within every aspect of her food service operation. Today culinary activists praise restaurant owners, like chef/owner Alice Waters, for their attention to sustainability and fresh ingredients. Unfortunately, activists and the media are unaware of, or ignore, the fact that implementing these important issues was, and still is, everyday routine for

¹⁵² See Figures in the Appendices.

¹⁵³ Mildred H. Coleman, "Coleman Cultural Materials Collection," (Atlantaongoing).

¹⁵⁴ In my mid 20th century experiences, Herren’s, Ma Hulls’, and Mary Mac’s Tea Room, as well as the Frances Virginia, used seasonal, Southern ingredients. However, I did not see them at the regionally acclaimed Midnight Sun, The Brothers Two, or hotels that catered to tourists after the 1950s. A Frances Virginia partner’s descendant told me that architect John Portman frequently dined at the Frances Virginia. However, Southern food was not a part of the plan at his Regency Hyatt Hotel and Peachtree Center office towers in downtown Atlanta. These new restaurants disassociated themselves from female tea room culture, Southern cooking and local ingredients until the 1990s shift in foodways movements.

dietitians like Frances Virginia with American Dietetic Association membership. While it is impressive that modern female restaurateurs like Waters are leading the way for their male counterparts, current and historical accounts fail to appreciate the decades of work done by Transition Era women like Frances Virginia—or imagine the size of their tea rooms in comparison to Waters' Chez Panisse. Frances Virginia's tea room seated 350, which is far larger than the average restaurant today, and more akin to our hotel banquet facilities.

A womanist lens lends an additional meaning to the placemat. A diner sent me an old placemat with a hand written, Escalloped Chicken recipe on the back and shared the story of how she had saved it for 60 years.¹⁵⁵ This diner valued the mat because it reminded her of the personal attention and accommodation rendered at the tea room when she implored the female server, "Please, can you get me the recipe for this delicious Escalloped Chicken with Rice and Almonds?" The diner saved the paper mat because the dietitian, presumably Frances Virginia, stopped her work, came out from the kitchen and wrote down the *recipe* for her. The diner's story authenticates Frances Virginia's care and concern for her diners. It also reveals respect for her food and hospitality and motivation to follow Frances Virginia's example. The diner had used the recipe over and over, serving the dish as her own special form of hospitality.

The female diner's contribution of her memorabilia is important because first, a female diner preserved the memorabilia; and then donated it to me because I am a female researcher. Second, the mat can be viewed as a particularly *female* example of a cultural materials object since it accompanied one woman's experience of a special noontime meal. This artifact, with its

¹⁵⁵ Coleman, "Coleman Cultural Materials Collection."

penciled recipe, augments the diner's story and supports my argument that the Frances Virginia had specific feminist and womanist implications and multiple connotations of hospitality.

Nowadays, chicken with rice doesn't sound so remarkable. Some gourmets may see this recipe as old-fashioned. In contrast, the diner, now characterized as a senior citizen, remembered the Frances Virginia's Escalloped Chicken with rice as *the prime* example of the *most fabulous* culinary treat she had ever encountered as a young woman. In a generational comparison of today's hospitality, servers often ignore a guest's request for entrée ingredients. Alternatively, chefs choose to *sell* rather than *give* away their recipes. However, this diner had fondly remembered her happy encounter with female caretaking and Frances Virginia hospitality. In her gendered culture and her personal memory of the 1940s, this Frances Virginia Tea Room experience represented the finest of Southern hospitality. Furthermore, she had modeled this Frances Virginia style of womanist hospitality for 40 years, every time she prepared the Frances Virginia recipe and graciously served Escalloped Chicken to her own family and guests.¹⁵⁶

Another example of Frances Virginia's menu items having a great effect is her most popular dessert, Sherry Chiffon Pie.¹⁵⁷ Socially, men could drink with little censure. In 1950, the 3 martini lunch at men's clubs and restaurants was acceptable and provided a large percent of the profits. According to my interviewees' accounts, it was the maître d' or manager who generally prevented single women from entering a bar or a restaurant that served liquor. Especially in the South, women could not serve liquor or drinks without criticism by their hometown, Protestant preachers and relatives. Other women found places that were less strict about admitting female drinkers, especially if they were part of a group. For instance, some married

¹⁵⁶ Joseph Mitchell, conversations, a male diner's story, 2006.

¹⁵⁷ Agnes Coleman New, conversations about Frances Virginia experiences, August 19 1979.

Frances Virginia diners from Columbus, Georgia, relished how they took the train to Atlanta where they could play bridge and anonymously venture into the Paradise Room at the Henry Grady Hotel across the street from the Frances Virginia. However, young, single women freely drinking in bars did not happen until my 1960s career days. African Americans led the way as demonstrators protested racial discrimination through lunchroom sit-ins. Following the passage of civil rights acts, gendered social drinking codes and dining restrictions began to change. The new laws freed forbid gender as well as racial discrimination in public food service facilities.

Frances Virginia added a post-prohibition dimension to the tea room's image of modern, comfort food with *Sherry* Chiffon Pie. True to her character, she operated within her Protestant, churchgoing culture, but on the cutting edge. Not quite supporting drinking of alcohol after Prohibition ended, and possibly unable to obtain a liquor license as a woman, her menu acknowledged a bit of alcohol. Topsy Trifle, Sherry Custard Sauce or Rum Cream Pie might be in good taste—at the *end* of a meal in a delicious dessert.¹⁵⁸ Strict, tee-totaling women like my Scots-Irish, Presbyterian grandmother and her Victorian era friends, felt they could allow themselves a dollop of Sherry Whipped Cream or Sherry Custard with a cookie without raising the ire of social condemnation or violating their conservative beliefs.¹⁵⁹

I have emphasized the tea room as liberatory space for heterosexuals because most of my conversations were with people from the generations who were not accustomed to revealing their sexual preferences. And I am of the generation who was told it was not polite to ask. However, I was aware of some lesbians and gays whose conversation intimated that the

¹⁵⁸ Modern food scientists like Shirley Corriher, inform us that a bit of alcohol in recipes will affect the flavor elements. Thus the sherry in Frances Virginia's whipped cream enhanced the ordinary ingredients of her Pumpkin Pie, just like the liqueur in today's popular Tiramisu.

¹⁵⁹ This seems to be the generational image people think of when they imagine tea rooms, instead of the Frances Virginia flappers of the 1920s and 1940s war time career women.

Frances Virginia was a beneficial space for all gays and lesbians. Two gay men divulged, “We felt safe with the women in tea rooms... preferred them... still do.” A lesbian executive reported leaving, “my office and walking to the Frances Virginia *every day!*” and bypassing the store’s employee cafeteria and lunchrooms in order to get there.¹⁶⁰

The traditional tea room stereotype ignores the presence of men, but more than a few reported the tea room’s importance in developing their relationships with women. The womanist lens allows us to recognize that these important things happen at the dining room table. A newspaper reporter fondly remembered how privileged he felt as a boy when “Aunt Aggie” and her sister thought he was mature enough to join them for lunch. An insurance businessman revealed, “I made it a point to interview potential employee salesmen over lunch at the Frances Virginia... where I could see how they handled themselves around women... if they were courteous to the waitresses, how they treated the hostess and the partners....” One woman’s husband proposed marriage to her sitting at a the Frances Virginia. She reminisced, “We were at a table for two, beside a Peachtree Street window. He took me to dinner there on our first date because he knew I liked it. It became our special place.”¹⁶¹ Indeed, the feminist author, bell hooks,¹⁶² and author Layli Maparyan insist that women need men like these who are partners in, and of, the feminist movement.¹⁶³

In one interview, I compared the female owned tea room to a nearby “male” restaurant that was started about the same time by a professional boxer. Ed Negri, the last proprietor of Herren’s, insisted that his Herren’s was fully open to women whether escorted by their hus-

¹⁶⁰ In fact, this person was instrumental in getting the Frances Virginia cookbook published.

¹⁶¹ Coleman, “Coleman-Family Personal Collection.”

¹⁶² Gloria Watkins, a cultural critic and feminist theorist, does not capitalize her pen name, bell hooks.

¹⁶³ Phillips, *The Womanist Reader*, 107-8.

bands or not. He went on, “One time I noticed two women peering into our window. So I came out and asked if I could help them. They nervously replied, ‘Can women eat here?’ I said, ‘Of course,’ and *I escorted* them inside to eat” (my emphasis).¹⁶⁴

Some might feel he was helping the women, but to me, his story emphasizes my point—that although restaurants were public spaces, a male escort and/or protection was needed in order for females to enter. While women were blatantly denied service at the Cockerel Grill or the Piedmont Driving Club, women internalized patriarchal social rules and would not break them. Many who I interviewed told me they would not have attempted entry into Herren’s, The Coach and Six, or The Midnight Sun, unless invited and taken there by boyfriends, fathers, or husbands. Although Negri had earlier mentioned he felt discrimination as an immigrant, *Italian*, restaurant owner, deconstructing his story reveals that he was, and to my way of thinking, remains unaware of the depth of gendered social prohibitions and women’s less privileged position as diners. Despite his perceived lower ethnic status, and kind heart, as a male restaurateur, he was in control of the women. They needed his permission to enter.

By comparison, the women I interviewed would have had no such apprehension about entering a tea room and ordering a meal for themselves. No one described themselves as oppressed in tea rooms, however, a few got tired of, “always eating there with social and business groups.” Some women mentioned the differences in other dining facilities, “If you were with a date, you sometimes got a ‘female’ dinner menu with no prices listed.” There were obsequious waiters “who only talked to my escort, ignoring my culinary questions.” Another mused, “I was aware that my mother and I always ate in the car at the Varsity, but I never considered why we

¹⁶⁴ Ed Negri, Oral History, June 20 2011.

never went inside—until now. It was not socially permitted.” One Texas female culinary entrepreneur was still furious about gendered legal restrictions to buy a car, “to drive to my *own* food service business. I had to get my retired father’s signature for the loan.”

Dining as Self Care and Empowerment

Hospitality is “an open, pleasant, caring, inviting, generous, cordial place.”¹⁶⁵ Diners tell me that the Frances Virginia represented hospitality for them. “Mama Wickle,” Frances Virginia’s mother (Mrs. C. A. Wickle), welcomed people, by “inviting us into the tea room as if it were her own home,” explained one diner. This cordial touch continued after Frances Virginia and her mother retired. Partners Louise Nabell and Ruth Pannell personally greeted and seated diners, causing one 1950s diner to assume, “I always thought one of the ladies who welcomed us must be Frances and the other was Virginia.”

The feminist lens allows us to see Frances Virginia and her partners as astute businesswomen who recognized that care and attention to diners ensured their tea room’s profitability and thus enabled self-satisfaction and financial sustainability for themselves. As the owners, they could observe and tend to problems immediately. The womanist lens illuminates action around the tea room tables and specific practices they initiated to insure others’ happiness, which is ultimately reflected in thousands of diners’ delight in sharing long-term, fondly recalled, experiences.

¹⁶⁵ In our 2011 article, “Kitchen Talk: Conversaciones De La Cocina” for *The National Culinary Review*, my co-author and I argued that food service *hospitality* must include employee/management hospitality, especially toward the least privileged employees, namely Hispanics, who are denigrated for not knowing English. We re-formed our description after noting Frances Virginia’s example.

In addition to female-style, Southern hospitality and physical sustenance, nutritious meals sustained their bodies. The open, dining room décor was soothingly pleasant; fresh flowers garnished the tables; women, heterosexual couples, lesbians, and gay men felt safe to converse. The tea room accommodated families with sturdy but fine quality children's furniture: highchairs for babies, rather than the greasy, unstable suction cup "baby" seats, which embarrassed youngsters who deemed themselves too old to need extra support. For these older children there were special long legged, "junior" chairs that imitated the adult designs but raised young diners up to a more comfortable dining height.

A novelty at the time, servers presented children their own special menus; and individual boxes of animal crackers as take-home souvenirs or eat-at-the-table dessert. Everyone felt cared for and intimately connected by the servers' accommodations, which the partners had instigated and trained them to carry out. This process entwined Frances Virginia diners, owners and employees. These small things made big differences that the womanist lens enables us to see that Frances Virginia's female education and home economics training focusing on inclusively was involved in developing this as a reciprocal system of hospitality.

On the other hand, because Atlanta was a segregated society, African Americans were not welcome to dine in the Frances Virginia dining room. Within these racial confines, however, Frances Virginia offered kitchen hospitality to all employees, black and white. According to one 1930s female and one 1960s male employees, Helen Paris and Albert Goodgame, unlike some tea rooms and restaurants, during their times the Frances Virginia offered two free meals daily to all employees and encouraged sociability within the kitchen community. Employees

were valued for their ingenuity and skills as salad makers, pastry or vegetable specialists.¹⁶⁶ This was unlike the jobs they held had as domestics,¹⁶⁷ working in solitude, or the pressing, body to body, machismo inside The Varsity which the black female workers had to endure.¹⁶⁸

The benefits of working at the Frances Virginia lasted a lifetime for one African American woman I interviewed, Magnolia Browning. Browning is the only living Black employee I could locate. She was hired to be a kitchen and dining room helper as a fifteen-year-old girl, just before the Frances Virginia closed. Her training as a waitress and the Frances Virginia culinary experience has lasted a lifetime. She has always found work and even at 60+, she is highly valued as a food service employee at Clairmont Place in Atlanta. Browning has kept her job despite layoffs in the restaurant industry of others her age and/or the industry's preference for younger, and presumably more energetic, servers. Residents of the retirement apartments tell me they remember Browning from their last days at the Frances Virginia, which carries into the mutual companionability of life at this particular facility.

Frances Virginia used her tea room's private clubroom as an incubator to grow and nourish professional women, college alumnae, dietetics and home economics associations, according to newspapers reports. Diners who were telephone operators, insurance company employees, garden club and church group members recall the celebration luncheons and business meetings that brought them together which they wouldn't have had the space, cooking or serving ability in their homes. One added laughingly, "Sometimes I even got tired of meeting there.

¹⁶⁶ Helen Paris, "My Work at the Frances Virginia Tea Room and Tray Shop," (Roswell, Georgia: St. George Retirement Village, 2006).

Albert Goodgame, ongoing interviews since 1981

"Contracts" Nov 9, 2009 Nov. 9, 2009.

¹⁶⁷ Susan Neill and Staci Catron-Sullivan, *Women in Atlanta* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2005).

¹⁶⁸ "Inside the Varsity 1959 - What'll Ya Have!," (Atlanta: Pullen Library, Special Collections Department, Georgia State University, 1959).

But they made it so easy and always took care of us.” The curtained room, cordoned off from the open dining space, was like a female womb. In this more private space, inexperienced women learned from watching their elders or by trial and error, how to conduct social and business meetings as officers using parliamentary procedure, making financial reports and negotiating their differences as committee members on large civic projects as well as the minutiae of selecting a menu for the meeting itself.

In a specific example mentioned in an Atlanta newspaper, Frances Virginia hosted 264 home economics students and alumnae from her alma mater over a pre-conference dinner at her tea room where she and the more experienced home economists would have prepared the urban and rural students and/or delegates for participation in the conference.¹⁶⁹

For example, one of Frances Virginia’s diners reflected her acknowledgement of needing and giving herself self-caring hospitality at the Frances Virginia:

Diner: Whenever I had the money, I’d treat myself to lunch at The Frances Virginia. Because I deserved it. I couldn’t wait to get there during my lunch hour. I’d race down there in my high heel shoes, my hat and hair just a flyin’. I *had* to rush, because I only had an hour for lunch in those days. I was a Southern Bell Telephone operator in 1942. I’d get down there every time I could, but it was so expensive. I felt guilty for spending so much money. However, you know, it was worth it. It was worth every penny I paid. I *deserved* a treat like that every once in a while.

¹⁶⁹ "Home Economists Will Elect Today," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 24 1932, 6.

Millie: You deserved a treat. Tell me more.

Diner: Yes, you see, I was married and my husband was overseas. If he'd been home, I probably would have spent my money on things for the house or nice meals for him. But he was gone and I was in Atlanta in a tiny apartment and working. So I felt I deserved a little treat for myself, with him being gone and all. The Frances Virginia was the best place in town a lady could eat by herself.

Millie: Is there a reason you didn't treat yourself by going to a movie?

Diner: Well, I suppose I could have, but I hate to do things like that all alone. At the Frances Virginia, I didn't feel so lonesome. The way they treated you it was just as if you were among family. Plus, you'd often see a friend in line and sometimes you'd decide to share a table. It was usually crowded, hard to get a table in those days because of so many war people downtown.

Another diner reflects on the staff's hospitality and special attention to her preferences:

Millie: So the staff seemed like they were happy to see you?

Diner: Oh yes, they knew all us regulars and I had my favorite waitress. If she spotted me in line, she'd head back to the kitchen, get a slice of my favorite, Bread and Butter Pudding¹⁷⁰, before it was all gone. When I got to my table, she'd pull it out from inside her serving stand to surprise me.

Millie: Do you remember what you paid for lunch?

Well not really, probably about 50 cents for a cottage cheese salad and one of those fresh blueberry muffins, if I didn't have much money. Maybe a Devil'd Crab and a hot Fudge Sundae with Toasted Almonds on top, if I was flush. That's what we said in those days when we had a little money in our pocket-books.

Some critics might argue this attentive service was merely a clever employee's way to guarantee good tips, remembered in culinary lore as a box that read, "To Insure Prompt Service." However, a womanist perspective points to the appreciation of a caring, reciprocal relationship between diners and employees. Despite the fact that money changed hands, this hos-

pitable service was understood to be mutually beneficial to each party, rather than a manifestation of the employee's power over the diner. Unlike teachers or factory workers with an established salary, the tea room waitresses and customers negotiated for equality on a day-to-day basis, with an eye toward future service and tips.

We can see mutual beneficence in the personal and financial arrangements between Frances Virginia and her partners in their ever-changing contract agreements. Frances Virginia decided to form a partnership, with active working female partners who held a variety of shares and performed duties that suited their talents and time schedules at the varying stages of their lives. Each partner was invested in the tea room's performance, which included maintaining a community atmosphere among all the people who worked there. Thus, Frances Virginia spread out the tea room's day to day responsibilities, empowering workers and staff by imbuing them with some sense of responsibility, and increasing the potential for success. This partnership arrangement showed her care and concern for her widowed mother, sister, and a niece working to earn money for college. At the same time, her family members were empowered to support themselves in jobs they were suited for and liked.

According to those I interviewed, mutual concern and close employee/partner relations facilitated Frances Virginia Tea Room's success in keeping an appreciable number of employees who stayed at the tea room almost their whole working lives, or until they chose to leave. Even in the days before minimum wage was mandatory, tea room employees made good, livable wages especially compared to domestics or the jobs open to them as the less economically privileged. They kept all their tips. Uniforms and upkeep were free.¹⁷¹ One 1930s teenage server

¹⁷¹ Goodgame, Albert, conversations. 1995-ongoing.

remembers, "little cots where we could rest between shifts... But mind you, she was strict. We couldn't just say 'Salad' like other places. We had to smile and politely ask, 'Would you like a salad?'"¹⁷²

While white relatives were greeting each other in the dining room, a staff of African American relatives were empowering themselves and caring for each other in the prep rooms and kitchens. Partners Agnes New, Louise Nabell and Ruth Pannell recalled that, in the 1940s, the original chef, John Tinsley an African American, brought in his sisters Mary, Louellen, Susie, Lilly; and his brother Joe. "Even though we might hire other people, if the kitchen family members didn't approve of them or like the way they behaved and worked, they would find a way to run them off."¹⁷³

During the Transitional Era, when women were barred from many of Atlanta's public and private dining facilities,¹⁷⁴ tea rooms served as sites for white females to learn how to maneuver within their gendered society.¹⁷⁵ Lunches at the Frances Virginia operated as intergenerational training sites for elders to teach younger females how to build networks and access cooperative power through kindness and hospitality. The Frances Virginia was also where more experienced females could teach and exhibit navigational skills needed in the urban world. One diner remembers traveling with her rural South Carolina grandmother:

Since we didn't have big department stores in our little town, like they did in Atlanta, once a year, usually around Easter or Thanksgiving, we'd take the train to Georgia. After shopping at Davison's, we'd cross the street and head upstairs to the Frances Virginia.

New.

¹⁷² Paris, "My Work at the Frances Virginia Tea Room and Tray Shop."

¹⁷³ New.

¹⁷⁴ Atlanta History Center Archives, "Business File: Rich's #2," (1960s).

¹⁷⁵ Brandimarte, "To Make the Whole World Homelike: Gender Space and America's Tea Room Movement."

After the meal, Muzzy, that's what we called my shaky grandmother who wobbled with palsy, would rummage around in her little coin purse to find a quarter. Then she'd smile, look the server directly in the eyes and say, "Now, here's a little something for *you*." As a teenager, I knew that quarter was a lot of money for my widowed grandmother. While the server might not have understood my grandmother's financial straits, I knew she understood my grandmother was trying to establish a personal connection and express gratitude for a woman's hard work of serving and clearing the dishes. Muzzy's deliberate action taught me the importance of acknowledging the waitress and thanking her for service.¹⁷⁶

Her final comment validates hospitality's long-term effectiveness as a social change method, perhaps more memorable than fiery speeches: "Today when I am tempted to scribble a tip and my name on the Visa ticket, I remember my grandmother's lesson: Thank you. I left a little something for you."¹⁷⁷ This diner's memory reinforces the practice of hospitality as a social change method grounded in the everyday. It demonstrates a method anyone can use, every day, to engage social change activism. The diner's story also motivated me by reminding me that social change begins with *my* actions as a representative of feminist philosophy. In a fast-food world, it is my responsibility to slow down and to acknowledge hospitality and kindness by personally thanking those who serve me.¹⁷⁸

Another diner's story posits the Frances Virginia as *the* site for female managers to mentor and honor female subordinates. It was also the place to observe multiple female models of

¹⁷⁶ Caroline Smith Sherman, 2010.

¹⁷⁷ Coleman, "Coleman-Family Personal Collection."

¹⁷⁸ The Les Dames d'Escoffier professional culinary association makes it a point to invite servers and kitchen staff into the dining room after conference banquets. Members applaud and acknowledge the skill it took to prepare and serve the meal.

professional behavior. A current Atlanta Fulton County public librarian remembers, “When I came here, to the Carnegie Library, as it was called then, during my first week on the job, my [female] supervisor took me down the street to eat lunch at the Frances Virginia Tea Room. It was her special way of welcoming me. . . . Lots of other librarians ate there too. They all wore hats, which were part of the socially required, female “uniform” at the time.

Hospitality with a Heart and Civic Mission

Two for One Meals

In many historical case studies, we can only imagine the motivation behind a person’s actions. However, through news quotes, contextual articles and advertisements preserved in historical newspaper archives, Frances Virginia speaks today, as she did to the 1930s Atlanta community. These clearly delineate her most impressive example of womanist action: her intention to use her tea room to assist her community during the devastating 1930s economy. Her financial plan, as reported in Atlanta newspapers,¹⁷⁹ goes against current capitalist thinking and policy during our 21st century economic depression.

A current Cornell University hospitality textbook calls price a “strategic weapon” to *wield against others* for competitive positioning.¹⁸⁰ Restaurant owners apply this force in our current economic downturn, by advertising discounted meals as a gimmick to increase their profitability and displace other businesses, who are seen as enemy competitors.¹⁸¹ In contrast,

¹⁷⁹ "Two-for-One Plan Tried by Restaurant," *Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 18 1933, 5A.

¹⁸⁰ Cathy A. Enz, ed. *The Cornell School of Hotel Administration : Handbook of Applied Hospitality Strategy* (Los Angeles: Sage,2010).

¹⁸¹ I have 6 such coupons in my purse. Only one is labeled a ‘gift’ from the restaurant for \$10 off a meal price.

Frances Virginia considered herself a part of a community in despair and believed she could effect a potential solution to its woes. Operating out of faith, she decided to use price as a strategy to improve conditions within her community.

It is possible to trace some of her inspiration to her American Home Economics Association (AHEA) membership and national conference attendance. In June, five months before her action, Frances Virginia was a delegate to the 1932 AHEA conference in Atlanta where speakers urged all home economists to assist consumers, to protect their savings, to apply home economics and business economics to relieve the Depression.¹⁸² As an official Georgia delegate, she would have sat in these meetings. It is probable that the speakers and interactions with other women at the home economics conference spurred Frances Virginia's intention to do something in her community to help her ailing country. That autumn she took action, instigating a yearlong "2 for 1 meals" promotion, where she aimed "to relieve [public] distress and improve business conditions" in the South. This was an extraordinary risk since she herself was facing higher rents and uncertainty in her new, larger, Peachtree Street location.

During this promotional year, *The Atlanta Constitution* reported that Frances Virginia gave away 81,365 meals out of the 304,284 meals she served from Nov 1, 1932 to Nov 15, 1933. This was more than a charitable tithe. She gave away 27%, more than one fourth of her meals, which amounted to a \$48,729.96 retail value. A reporter quotes Frances Virginia [and/or her partners] by writing, "This is a gallant undertaking... these women are more than pleased... and feel that they struck a 'body blow' at the forces of depression." The partners describe the "very substantial increase in [our food] purchases from the wholesale houses and the

¹⁸² "Home Economists Will Elect Today," 6.

large additional employment made necessary." The newspaper reporter concludes, "an interesting experiment in combating the late depressed conditions has been successfully concluded by a quartet of Atlanta women who operate the Frances Virginia Tea Room."¹⁸³

At the end of the promotion, Frances Virginia purchased an advertisement to thank her diners for their cooperation, stating her joy that with their participation, "We almost doubled our number of employees during a period when many otherwise would have been in dire straits." Frances Virginia's altruistic motivation to help the community, "whether we profited or not,"¹⁸⁴ engaged diners' participation in the project. Reading the accounts through a womanist lens allows us to see personal faith and selfless philanthropy as motivations for her action and to trace the rippling effects of her policies from her immediate employees to such people as linen/laundry suppliers, wholesale distributors and the Georgia farmers who produced the additional food she served.¹⁸⁵

Her motherly concern for her suffering community motivated others to act in concert and infused their collective memories. Illuminating this female story, unacknowledged by historians, reveals how Frances Virginia's actions contributed to the remarkable esteem the public had for this particular tea room, as well as its popularity. In addition, from a feminist perspective, this move enabled her and her female partners to challenge patriarchal assumptions that women could not survive in the restaurant business if they were "soft-hearted." In fact, according to family stories, Frances Virginia's soft-hearted business acumen and worker/partnerships with other female friends and family members enabled the women to support

¹⁸³ "Two-for-One Plan Tried by Restaurant," 5A.

¹⁸⁴ Advertisement, "Thrift Tickets Have Expired: Display Ad 4-1933-Nov.16 " *The Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 16 1933, 2.

¹⁸⁵ "Two-for-One Plan Tried by Restaurant.", — — —, "Going Back to Normal Service."

themselves and/or their families, and assisted her sister's daughter to go to college. These included her aged mother, her tragically widowed sister,¹⁸⁶ and her niece, as well as several unmarried women. These single women might have been labeled "old maids" or "spinster secretaries" if they had not become influential members of the restaurant scene and public role models as "Frances Virginia Tea Room owners."¹⁸⁷

Recently I spoke about Frances Virginia's altruistic business practices with the Campus President of Le Cordon Bleu Culinary School in Atlanta. Frances Virginia's intentional use of her tea room as a site of activism astounded him. "We would never think of food service like that today, or even mention it to students."¹⁸⁸ This sharply contrasts with The Transition Era home economics and modern women's studies educational ideology and activist practices for the commonweal of humanity. Clearly, Frances Virginia supported and embodied these principles during her historical era and stands as a role model today.

Cordial Welcome

The womanist lens also allows us to examine Frances Virginia within her gendered Southern culture. After vociferous First Wave feminists' hunger strikes, marches and so-called radical behavior finally won women's right to vote, society expected women to go back to "civilized" behavior. People assumed that changes could, and would, be made at the ballot box, by staying put in the communities and not straying very far from the cultural norms. During this Transition Era, middle-class, white, Southern women expected to work within the patri-

¹⁸⁶ James F. Hon. Morris, "Rule of Law Doesn't Just Happen," *Georgia Bar Journal* 16, no. No. 2 (2010).

¹⁸⁷ Frances Virginia Tea Room Partners, "Amendment to Partnership Agreement," ed. Georgia Fulton County (Atlanta 1945), 2009 interview, Burleigh, Sally Kemp Baker, Oct. 11 2009, Coleman, *The South's Legendary Frances Virginia Tea Room Cookbook*.

¹⁸⁸ Mack.

archal system. They could go to college, but they must study and prepare for women's fields such as home economics, teaching and nursing. They could venture into city department stores by themselves, but they could not go into the men's grills or hotel dining rooms alone.

However, women like Frances Virginia found a way to resist these gendered restrictions with a method termed "standing in" by Maparyan in *The Womanist Idea* whereby someone stays within a system or institution and works to change it from within.¹⁸⁹ Unlike Suffragettes or Civil Rights demonstrators, Frances Virginia and her women diners did not attempt to enter the male food service space. She did not aim to become a chef. Instead, Frances Virginia made a conscious decision to open a food service business in her own female name. She decorated it with energizing feminine colors, and served typically Southern, not British, food.

She called it a *tea room*, a cultural term which distinguished it as an inclusive space where women (and men) were welcome to enjoy food and service as fine as any in the South. Frances Virginia stayed within her cultural norm, like millions of other Transition Era women who participated in the tea room movement. By wearing their dietitians' uniforms, *standing in* their tea room kitchens, and feeding diners dressed in the socially required hosiery, hats¹⁹⁰ and gloves, the women of the tea room movement shook the foundations of public space awareness. They nourished the bodies that fueled the next feminist movement for a more welcoming society.

One of the intentions of womanist hospitality is to welcome those who are outside one's household or cultural circle. This action facilitates the potential for strangers to under-

¹⁸⁹ Maparyan, *The Womanist Idea*, 72.

¹⁹⁰ We must note that Frances Virginia wore no hat in her branded silhouette image. We do not know if revealing her bobbed hairstyle was fashionably commonplace or an indication of a rebellious spirit demonstrating a Southern female modernity.

stand, collaborate and manage differences the traditionally rural Southern culture of hospitality permeated urban Atlanta during the Transition Era. During the WWII years, Atlanta overflowed with out-of-state visitors who were newcomers to Southern language, food and history. Agnes New, the last Frances Virginia Tea Room, dietitian, and her partners remembered the cultural upheavals of the WWII 1940s: “We were overwhelmed with thousands of war related visitors and workers every day! They had never tasted Southern Fried Chicken with Rice and Gravy, green [fresh caught, never frozen] Georgia shrimp, pecan pie or eggplant without Italian tomato sauce.”

The partners’ actions displayed womanist methodology and methods of care and nurturance as well as professional, home economics inspired techniques. The Frances Virginia cookbook chapter introductions/stories demonstrate and elaborate the collaborative, womanist style of the Frances Virginia operation in several facets of the operation. Over the years, various female partners applied congenial, intuitive methods to ensure profitability, maintain sanitation and reputable service.¹⁹¹

Food for Life

There are too many attributes related to food to detail them all in this paper: food as love, as power and as global currency, to name a few of the most obvious. As a womanist scholar, I previously analyzed the Frances Virginia as a site of hospitality. As a Home Economist/Foodways Historian certified in Family and Consumer Sciences and familiar with dietary analysis, I now address Frances Virginia food as physical sustenance – that is, its contribution to people’s physical well-being during the Transition Era.

¹⁹¹ Coleman, *The South's Legendary Frances Virginia Tea Room Cookbook*.

Many people have only experienced tea room spaces and tea room food as the elitist convention of afternoon tea developed by and for the upper classes in Europe. These sweet scones and clotted cream with miniscule sandwiches were not intended to sustain the working classes. While momentarily delicious in the mouth, this upper class, Victorian tea menu does not sustain good health. Without optimal health, women are not fortified to do the hard work for social change. *The Womanist Idea* maintains that “bodily well-being is the foundation of other forms of well-being; a lack of good nutrition, fitness and health makes it hard for people to contribute their energy toward higher level concerns.”¹⁹²

Since specific examples of the type of dishes and menus Frances Virginia served are included in historical text, artwork and “Tea Room Notes” in *The South’s Legendary Frances Virginia Tea Room Cookbook*, researchers can use this work to further compare the Frances Virginia, which typifies the nutritious tea room lunch, and contrast it to the less nutritionally sustaining *afternoon tea* menus served at the Ritz Carlton Hotels to acknowledge previous generations’ memories. Such a comparison can further enhance the understanding of women’s culture and historical tea room traditions among the jeans generation or activists who have little conception of a tea room as a space for social liberation and physical fitness.

Though today’s diners are relatively nutritionally sophisticated and able to discuss omega-3 fatty acids and LDL cholesterol,¹⁹³ Dr. Joseph Huff, University of West Georgia Assistant Professor of Biology, was astonished that despite the plethora of health information, his nursing students are ignorant of current recommended serving sizes, much less what was con-

¹⁹² Maparyan, *The Womanist Idea*, 53.

¹⁹³ According to an Atlanta dietitian, Maribeth Brannen, RD, omega-3 is an essential element found in fish oils i.e. salmon and recently touted as protective. Omega-3 is comparable to Cod liver oil drops that babies were given during the Transition Era and helps to maintain a reduced Low Density Level (LDL) - the ‘bad’ cholesterol number

sidered an “average portion” 30 to 70 years ago.¹⁹⁴ Thus, when most people see historical menu entrees of Fried Chicken with Rice and Gravy, Chicken a la King on Toasted Noodles followed by desserts like Ice Cream Shortcake with Fudge Sauce or Chocolate Cream Pie, they imagine belly busting, high calorie feasts.

Like Dr. Huff, I am in a unique position to evaluate Frances Virginia’s nutrient-dense, moderate calorie menu contributions to Atlantans’ health because I have the kitchen records, recipes, serving scoops and measuring utensils that are necessary to evaluate the menus. For example, I can calculate the amount of sweet tea or carbonated drink a server would have poured into Frances Virginia’s 8 ounce, ice-filled, beverage glass. When compared with our 12 + ounce soft drink/sweet tea cans and bottles today, it is easy to dispel the myth that the Transition Era food was “fattening.” Actually preparing the food and seeing Frances Virginia’s small glasses and plates in relation to our expectations of super-sized portions served in oversized cups and dinnerware helps us understand why obesity is a health problem that Frances Virginia’s patrons seldom faced.

Agnes New, the later dietitian partner, explained how she taught staff to precisely measure portions of lemon filling, made with canned milk, into 9 inch pie crusts, but “pile on gobs of meringue,” before cutting into 6 or 8 slices. Meringue is made with egg whites, a naturally no-fat topping. In contrast, perhaps because they have no home economics or nutrition education, diners value and chefs oblige their self-indulgent preferences for butter and tout *real* (but nevertheless high fat and low calcium) cream on lemon pie. Home cooks reach for fro-

¹⁹⁴ Huff, Joseph, PhD, conversation. March 14 2012.

zen, artificial, fatty and/or sugary topping because it takes too long to whip up a no-fat, protein-based, vitamin B meringue.

When a Frances Virginia recipe called for a creamy dairy product, New used canned (also called evaporated) milk. This historic product has the consistency of cream but only 1/6 the fat; and twice the calcium to help prevent osteoporosis in people who can tolerate dairy products.¹⁹⁵ Frances Virginia would have recognized the nutritional deficiency symptoms in her diners with dowager's hump, frail wrists, and frequent fractures, but not the ailment name. As dietitians, Frances Virginia dietitians knew how to design nutritionally dense foods with calories appropriate to the diner's needs and priced to meet economic circumstances.

The most extravagant Frances Virginia meal I discovered was planned just before the October 29, 1929, stock market crash. In a newspaper advertisement shared with other restaurants, the tea room listed a very formal Thanksgiving Dinner menu with multiple courses for \$1.50. Although I cannot ascertain the 1920s serving proportions, the menu is still not outlandishly rich by our current standards. Low calorie shrimp and fruit cocktails whet the appetite before traditional Roast Turkey (or steak) and Walnut Dressing. Diners could choose two vegetables, a simple salad, plus one slice of pie or cheese and crackers for dessert. Mints, not fatty chocolates, are the final touch.¹⁹⁶

Frances Virginia consistently attended to her diners' pocketbooks, nutritional needs and their emotional desire for celebratory family meals throughout the years.¹⁹⁷ As The Depression

¹⁹⁵ In my study of foodways among cultures who originate near the equator, Greek, Ethiopian and southern Italian groups traditionally favor cultured dairy products like yogurt, kefir, buttermilk, ayran and specialized cheeses. This may be due to a lessening ability to digest fresh dairy products after becoming adults.

¹⁹⁶ Advertisement, "Thanksgiving Dinner Display Ad 23-1929-Nov.28 " *The Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 28 1929, 2.

¹⁹⁷ ———, "Display Ad 114 - No Title - Cordially Invite You to Dine Thanksgiving," *The Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 23 1939, ———, "Display Ad 40 - No Title - Thanksgiving Dinner," *The Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 29 1933, ———,

worsened, Thanksgiving ad size and extravagance shrunk. Formality and prices dropped, revealing less expensive dinners, smaller portions and “turkey plates” at an all time low of fifty cents.¹⁹⁸

One can compare the various meals nutritionally by looking at the above-mentioned ads or the souvenir menus.¹⁹⁹ The Frances Virginia 1929 and 1950s Thanksgiving meals are sharp contrasts with the gluttonous Thanksgiving buffet I saw in a country club three years ago. My brother-in-law ate so much he suffered a heart attack four hours afterwards, ruefully admitting at the hospital, “I shouldn’t have pigged out.”

While corporate facilities and fast food restaurants hire food service *operators*, they seldom employ dietitians like Frances Virginia, who was as concerned for her diners’ health as well as their happiness. All the Frances Virginia menus reflect this. The Frances Virginia emphasized vitamin-preserving cooking methods, low fat appetizers, fresh vegetables, salads, Georgia agricultural products, and meats. These are the same principles she applied when planning life-preserving menus as a therapeutic dietitian at Piedmont Hospital.²⁰⁰

Even a brief nutritional overview points to her dietetics training as a major, but less frequently considered, form of activism which prepared women’s Depression Era bodies for the upcoming stresses of WWII. During the hungry years, love and concern inspired her to give from her heart and use her considerable talents. Calculating her number of diners as a percentage of Atlanta’s population, the Frances Virginia administered sustaining nourishment and physical sustenance to close to 1% of Atlanta’s white population, a percentage McDonald’s

"Display Ad 8 -1934-Nov.29 Cordially Invite for Thanksgiving," *The Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 29 1934, — — —, "Display Ad 2-1937-Nov.24 Thanksgiving," *The Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 24 1937.

¹⁹⁸ Advertisement, "Display Ad 8 -1934-Nov.29 Cordially Invite for Thanksgiving," 2.

¹⁹⁹ Coleman, "Coleman Cultural Materials Collection."

²⁰⁰ Diane Erdlejac, by phone, 06-11-09 2009.

franchisees long for and unfathomable by those who believe Transition Era tea rooms to have been small, reclusive spaces.²⁰¹

In cultural context today, activists are worried about health crises here and abroad. Nutrition and dining related factors impact all our major diseases: diabetes, heart attack, high blood pressure, stroke, osteoporosis, obesity, eclampsia, low birth weight babies, alcoholic death rates, some forms of cancer and mental illness. If even one restaurateur within the Atlanta metro population of 3 million people behaved like Frances Virginia, he/she would improve the health of 30,000 people five days a week, from now until 2047. We might equate her over-all service with an idealistic goal for a cadre of women's studies/family and consumer sciences student activists. If they planned and carried out a sustainability goal or potential fitness improvement project at Frances Virginia's level, they could influence the health and attitude of every Georgia State student or every University of Georgia undergraduate for the next 30 years.

Of course, Frances Virginia diners could choose to drink several Coca Colas with triple orders of Coconut Cake with Lemon Filling. They could spread their small Crispy Cornsticks with multiple pats of butter (or oleomargarine during the WWII years). They could consume the entire order of Fried Chicken for Two, but Frances Virginia also set a social standard of conviviality, not gluttony. Paraphrasing *The Womanist Idea*, the Frances Virginia Tea Room was a nutritional model decorated for diners to envision themselves and their lives in optimal condition.²⁰² Her home economics and womanist methods within her Frances Virginia Tea Room epitomized the highest levels of simple, but good quality food, served in hospitable surroundings, whereby diners could converse and commune comfortably and with grace.

²⁰¹ Clifford M. Kuhn, student teacher conference, Apr 12 2010.

²⁰² Maparyan, *The Womanist Idea*, 54.

In our era of global food crises, social change activists face the challenges of transmuting the destructive energy of our own and others' food obsessions —food-as-entertainment, gastronomic orgies, and gluttonous portions—or diners distracted by cell phones and music orchestrated to turn tables faster, for a bigger profit. It may seem like an impossible task for a few altruistic people to effect these changes in 1-2,000 people a day like Frances Virginia did. However, if we think of social change as an ordinary, daily endeavor, instead of a numerical challenge, it seems less overwhelming. Frances Virginia just put on her uniform and went to work every morning, planning and serving meals to the best of her ability. The historical frame with activist lenses shaped by both feminism and womanism enables us to see what a difference she made.

Colors and Symbols as Activism: A Womanist Perspective

The Image of Frances Virginia

Although Frances Virginia's work might be under-acknowledged, her image and color choices are still visible in archival materials. Photos and ads depict her tea room, 1920s female silhouette and the colors of her Frances Virginia Tea Room sign as pink and green.²⁰³ The colors Frances Virginia chose for her menus, placemats, texts and drawings represented dynamic spaces where Frances Virginia was able to enact her womanist, activist approach to dietetics. She specified in her lease agreement that two signs would be placed, one each side of the Colli-

²⁰³ Coleman, "Coleman Cultural Materials Collection."

er Building.²⁰⁴ Day and evening, pink and green fluorescent tubes lit up the black and white silhouette sign outside the building; there were long, slender, pink pencils on each table for diners to write their orders;²⁰⁵ her silhouette decorated the sanitary, paper toothpick covers. Though she started with orange, blue and white china,²⁰⁶ sometime after the move to Peachtree Street all the menus, pencils, place mats, dishes, draperies, and wallpaper featured a continuous pink and green color scheme.²⁰⁷

Menu covers and place mats were another everyday pleantry at the Frances Virginia. The daily changing menus were attached to covers printed with pink and green dogwoods. This symbol linked Atlanta's many flowering botanical species with the Frances Virginia Tea Room's feminine hospitality and Southern cultural welcome. In conversations with the Frances Virginia partners and their families, they see these pink dogwood blossoms on green and creamy white menu covers as their connection to the agrarian, floral South. Some of the most outspoken Frances Virginia fans I encountered are Georgia garden club members who held meetings about civic beautification projects or met friends at the tea room. They are especially aware of the dogwoods and specifically link the Frances Virginia Tea Room design and décor to springtime Atlanta, when a profusion of pink and white dogwood trees blossomed and canopied the downtown city streets as well as the old neighborhoods.

Whitaker's striking silhouette and color choices made a memorable impression on passersby. Viewers report strong impressions of Frances Virginia's pink-and-green branded image: "I

²⁰⁴ Frances W. Whitaker, Hooper M. Beck, and C. A. Wikle, "Lease Agreement: G.W. Collier Estate and Frances Virginia Tea Room Partnership," ed. County of Fulton State of Georgia and Burdett Realty (Atlanta, GA1931).

²⁰⁵ The pencils and pads may have originated as Frances Virginia's way to accommodate servers' varied education levels in the 1920s, when many African Americans could neither read or write.

²⁰⁶ Baker.

²⁰⁷ Coleman, "Coleman Cultural Materials Collection."

remember the neon sign very well, even though I never got to eat there. It always caught my attention while I was walking down the street.”²⁰⁸ A womanist deconstruction of Frances Virginia’s logo and sign reveals an unexamined female activist method. Her silhouette logo and colors branded her tea room restaurant as a safe female space. However, unlike any other signs in the 1940s downtown Atlanta photo, Frances Virginia’s tea room sign is humanized, personalized with Whitaker’s own silhouette facing the sidewalk and street, as if inviting passers-by, especially women, “Come in.” Although the pink and green neon tubes are gray in the black-and-white photo, diners often mention them. They are symbolic colors. Green and pink are “complementary” in physics, psychology, and on the artist’s color wheel. They are used by home economics interior designers to make things stand out.²⁰⁹

Color Energies

In this section I focus on the aforementioned color scheme in relation to enigmatic principles of color, psychology, and the Indian chakra system as transformative methodologies. The green and pink colors Frances Virginia employed offer metaphysical meanings that would remain unexamined in traditional analyses. For example, Liz Simpson’s *Book of Chakra Healing* explains that green, not red, is the color of the heart, the human love center.²¹⁰ Green energy is derived from plants and their life-giving force. It is possible to link Frances Virginia’s green to dogwood trees in springtime as well as the many green/vegetable dishes and salads she served which enhanced diners’ health and their relationships while enjoying a meal together.

²⁰⁸ ———, “Coleman-Family Personal Collection.”

²⁰⁹ “Basic Color Schemes: Introduction to Color Theory,” Tiger Color, <http://www.tigercolor.com/color-lab/color-theory/color-theory-intro.htm#complementary>.

²¹⁰ Liz Simpson, *The Book of Chakra Healing* (New York: Sterling Publishing Company, Inc., 1999), 14,30,86.

“Exploring the Major Chakras” by About.com author, Phylameana Lila Desy, simplifies India’s ancient system, explaining that red is the base, or root, chakra and provides the principal “energies that empower human beings.”²¹¹ She informs us that pink is a soft derivative of red. Thus, pink empowers, but in an emotional way—through the heart. Together, pink and green are complementary sites for balancing physical and emotional healing energies. “It is impossible not to be affected by their positive energy.”²¹²

Frances Virginia’s art deco sign represented a powerful feminine ethos of modernity during her era. Her female silhouette and soft, fresh colors vibrated a cordial invitation to life-affirming meals and Southern hospitality. She was a determined businesswoman who balanced woman's nature and nurture against the harsh forces of those who might dismiss them in the patriarchal society.

Western critics might dismiss the chakra systems and say that color analysis is irrelevant to scholarly work. However, they undoubtedly recognize the phenomenal success of color in today’s activist campaigns, especially pink and green. Green has become the color of the environmental sustainability movement. The Breast Cancer Awareness program has reified pink as potent, empowering energy and has inspired feminine solidarity among women who used to hide in shame. Now all genders feel free to wear this significantly female color and march in heartfelt support for each other and to raise millions of dollars to fight breast disease.

There are no records of whether Frances Virginia intentionally selected pink and green for their psychological significance when planning her tea room décor and logo. And, I do not

²¹¹ Phylameana Lila Desy, "Root Chakra: Chakra One-Exploring the Major Chakras," About.com. ———, "Heart Chakra: Chakra Four- Exploring the Major Chakras," About.com. through the

²¹² Simpson, *The Book of Chakra Healing*.

argue that Frances Virginia's pink and green instilled such a dramatic social change as Breast Cancer awareness. However, those who saw her sign remembered the colors as well as her female silhouette. Diners' stories lead me to believe they understood the symbols stood for women's empowerment and nurture. To go there represented a special restorative, celebratory event.²¹³ During The Transition Era, Frances Virginia's tea room sent wholesome energies to heal human hearts and bodies that were suffering from the effects of the Depression and WWII. Though invisible to the eye, Indian spiritual leaders and womanist scholars understand their power as surely as fast food marketers acknowledge the power of McDonald's clown and golden colored arches to draw in children for fast food.

Western activists and physicians have begun to investigate these energetic forces that Native American healers and Eastern spiritualists have applied for eons. Chapter 6 of *The Womanist Idea*, "Spiritual Activism: A Womanist Perspective,"²¹⁴ argues that vibrational energy impacts our material reality. Change is made in deliberate as well as subconscious ways through this vehicle, accessible and freely available to everyone. To change the world, activists must first change themselves. Academic researchers are just now examining spiritual and vibrational energy outside of and occasionally within traditional scholarly programs.

²¹³ Baker.

Sherman, Mary Ann Burke, a librarian's experience, Dec. 8, 2010.

Pullen Library photograph, "Haverty Group at the Frances Virginia Tea Room," (Atlanta, GA: Pullen Library, Special Collections Department and Archives, Georgia State University.

Mitchell.

²¹⁴ Maparyan, *The Womanist Idea*.

CONCLUSION

This work answers the complex question, “Who was Frances Virginia?” by recovering her story as an Atlanta tea room entrepreneur and making the case that her business functioned as a site of womanist and feminist activism during The Transition Era. During this era, the first half of the twentieth century, tea rooms like hers flourished across America. The politics of memory have deemed these frivolous places, serving insubstantial food, frequented by upper-class women with extra time on their hands. However, this Frances Virginia story reveals the lives of visionary women (and men) whose stories were silenced by the shifting politics of the U.S. social movement landscape. When Frances Virginia founded her tea room, women could not dine in Atlanta²¹⁵ without a male escort. However, the “Frances Virginia” became one of the South's largest restaurants. This tea room, as busy as a modern McDonald's, was decidedly pivotal to women's health and their ability to become agents for themselves and to influence changes in their communities.

By observing her home economics based career through the lenses of feminism and womanism, we can focus on the innovativeness of her vision. In her day, everyone acknowledged Frances Virginia's tea room as a vibrant place and an important facet of Atlanta's Southern hospitality. Frances Virginia trained Atlanta's first student dietitians during her years as Piedmont Hospital's Head Dietitian when planning a meticulous diet was the *only* prescription to extend a diabetic's life.²¹⁶ She encouraged the generation who were freed to become doctors or dietitians. By recovering Frances Virginia's story, light shines on an extraordinary, yet

²¹⁵ Or most other towns and cities according to works by Kuhn, Whitaker and Brandimarte.

²¹⁶ Henley, 14,39.

everyday, woman whose contributions have gone largely unacknowledged. Now, we have the resources to ignore the stereotypes of passive females and re-image these white-gloved co-eds, uniformed staff and female partners as instruments of female activism in Atlanta's history.

I conclude that the old Frances Virginia Tea Room, with its "Chicken Salad with Special Dressing" and "Sherry Chiffon Pie," did not solve all societal problems, but it offered white women of multiple classes, and some black women, gay and straight men, and families of all kinds, a new space of opportunity; a physical and emotional place for reflection and development. For many, it was the first bite of a new food as well as a taste of twentieth-century *r  sistance* to gender injustice. It was the appetizer before the entr  e of what we now call Second Wave Feminism and the Civil Rights Movements.

It is ironic that, along with the new freedoms women gained, the great home economics careers like Frances Virginia's were lost because of new female opportunities. Gail Collins, author of *When Everything Changed*, bemoans this loss, "careers that had been open to women all along suffered a decline in prestige because they had, well, been open to women all along."²¹⁷ As aging home economists retired, their former jobs evaporated. Home economics students found new options—they could become doctors *or* dietitians. However, women were less interested in the traditional, lower paying "female jobs" like home economics, teaching, and nursing. With fewer students, some universities divided the home economics specialties and merged these departments into other divisions headed by men.

For example, due to the loss of home economics students in the 1970s, the University of Georgia phased out its restaurant administration major, which is what Frances Virginia and oth-

²¹⁷ Collins, Gail. *When Everything Changed: The Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to the Present*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009.

er female tea room entrepreneurs would have studied. During a University of Georgia class on home economics history in the fall of 2009, Dean Emerita Dr. Sharon Nickols acknowledged, “For a while the department had been a money loser for the College of Home Economics and I ruefully agreed to this decision.”²¹⁸

As other colleges followed suit, we home economics alumnae felt helpless to prevent the decimation, watching as male administrators slashed home economics programs and their inherently social ideology. Meanwhile, culinary arts programs began to grow in popularity at Le Cordon Bleu and the Art Institute of Atlanta. Today, it’s the hospitality, tourism and business schools, such as Georgia State University’s J. Mac Robinson College of Business, who prepare students for food service industry careers. While culinary and business programs admit women into the classes, the programs do not integrate home economics’ social or nutritional concerns.

With this change, modern food service preparation essentially replaced female-inspired humanitarianism with capitalism. Today food service and hospitality are business programs and/or technical arts practice. Culinary schools, like The Le Cordon Bleu, emphasize institutional culinary skills and the commercial economics of food advertisements, mergers, and strategies.²¹⁹ Home economists’ food service mission of municipal *housekeeping* has become the business of municipal *marketing*.

However, the tide is shifting again. With new waves of feminists, womanists and everyday consumers worried about local and global food issues, as well as their weight, activists can rise to the swell of new opportunities. By recognizing their common missions, institutions and activists in women’s studies, women’s history, family and consumer sciences, human ecology,

²¹⁸ Nickols, Sharon, PhD, class discussion at UGA. Spring semester 2010.

²¹⁹ Mack.

gender studies and other social sciences, can join forces with everyday citizens, to become agents for social change. The story of Frances Virginia and her tea room can inspire food activists of today and connect them with a long female legacy. We can note the motherly touch and spiritual heart of her activist philosophy, as well her calculated efforts to make space for women, as she negotiated within her gendered, segregated, Southern society.

When I began this project, I asked Peter Roberts, Georgia State University Archivist and associate professor, if he could help me search for a photo of the Frances Virginia Tea Room. He smiled and answered quickly, “Oh, I know the picture you mean. It circulates on the Georgia State University website. I always wondered who she was.”²²⁰ The person in the silhouette sign high above Peachtree Street was Frances Virginia Wikle Whitaker. She was a vibrant woman who started a tea room that influenced Atlanta’s history, particularly the history of Atlanta women. This thesis answers the question for Roberts, and for others who desire to uncover the past in order to improve the future.

²²⁰ Roberts, Peter J., archivist, conversation about Frances Virginia. Oct. 2009.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Feminist Wave Timeline

First Wave Feminism mid 1800s-1920

Legal and Social Issues: slavery, suffrage, prohibition, women's in labor, peace, communist, education, military and social equality movements. WWI, deadly worldwide flu epidemic

- 1880-1900 The Cotton States Exposition heralds "The New South Era" internationally
- 1895 Frances Virginia born, Cartersville, GA
- 1897 Frances Virginia's family moves to Marietta, north of Atlanta
- 1900 Atlanta population 89,000, 40% African American
- 1908 Ford's Model T car, changed travel and labor practices
 - GA passes Prohibition 1908-35, 12 years before national amendment
- 1909 American Home Economics Association founded
- 1913-15 FV and sisters, classmates with Soong sisters (Madame Chiang Kai-shek, Chinese Nationalist Republic's First Lady and Madame Sun 'mother of Nationalist China') Wesleyan College, Macon, GA
- 1917 Frances Virginia receives home economics collegiate diploma, Milledgeville, GA
- 1920 U.S. Women's Suffrage passes; despite Atlanta activism, GA refused to ratify until 1970; Atlanta population skyrockets to 200,000; 322 Atlanta eating places
- 1920 42% of Atlanta women worked outside the home: 48% are white

First Wave Feminism 1920-1960, The Transition Era

Legal and Social Issues: women's activism in home economics, civic clubs, labor, peace, education, nutritional feeding civilians and military. Polio, malnutrition, bacterial epidemics, The Great Depression, Female role models: First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, Rosie the Riveter, and Marilyn Monroe, WWII

- 1920s Frances Virginia, Head Dietitian Piedmont Hospital; vitamins, diet and diabetes discoveries;
- 1926 U of GA, Athens, admits first females, but only to study home economics

- Atlanta remains Mecca for working women: downtown jobs necessitate public dining
- 1927 Frances Virginia Tea Room opens on Poplar St., Atlanta
- 1929 Beginning of The Great Depression
- 1931 Frances Virginia Tea Room expands, moves to Peachtree St., 'Heart of the New South', serves 1000 per day
- 1939 Atlanta's record tourism year; most facilities and jobs segregated by race and gender
 - *Gone With the Wind* movie premier in Atlanta
 - Rise of Ku Klux Klan
- 1939-45 WWII: US enters 1941; Food rationing; war industries and personnel headquarters in Atlanta;
 - Frances Virginia Tea Room bustles, nourishes 2000 diners per day
- 1950 Women fired from war jobs; use saved wages to finance middle-class home ownership

Second Wave Feminism 1960-80

Legal and Social Issues: race and gender discrimination in jobs, wages, education and sports. Playboys and their bunnies, Rosa Parks, Angela Davis as role models

- 1960 FDA approves birth control pill
- 1962 Frances Virginia's death, Frances Virginia Tea Room closes
- 1963 Betty Freidan writes *The Feminine Mystique*, founds National Organization for Women
 - Herren's owner volunteers: first 'white' Atlanta restaurant to serve African Americans
- 1964 Civil Rights Act passed, forbids many discriminations including gendered public dining; 1970s Atlanta women enter The Varsity;
 - Rich's closes its 'Men Only' Cockerel Grill, it's Magnolia [Tea] Room remains

Post Second Wave Feminism 1980-present

Legal and Social Issues: remaining inequities of race, gender, sex, religion, peace, ecology; multiple theories and methods developed to empower those outside the privileged social order

- 1980 Womanism developed as outgrowth of black/women's/feminist theories; includes hospitality and cooking as activist methods
- 1990s New style tea rooms include Victorian, Asian, Mickey D's iced tea, organic green, Indian chai tea popularized at Starbucks Coffee; British "afternoon tea" incorrectly labeled in America as 'high tea;' sports bars for girls' night out
- 1996 Atlanta women join Les Dames D'Escoffier International, replacing Home Economics networks as culinary businesswomen's mentoring groups
- 2011 Corporate Starbucks and other self serve coffee places replace independent, female owned tea rooms as comfortable spaces for women; Mary Mac's and The Colonade remain as Atlanta's last old style tea rooms

Appendix B: Photos and artworks



Fig. 1 Frances Virginia in her dietitian's uniform
Courtesy of Piedmont Hospital Archives



Fig. 2 Frances Virginia with son
Coleman Family Personal Collection



Fig. 3 Frances Virginia as a retiree
Courtesy of Piedmont Hospital Archives



Fig. 4 Close-up of Frances Virginia's silhouette on the Frances Virginia Tea Room sign
Courtesy of Special Collections Department, Pullen Library, Georgia State University



Special Collections Department, Pullen Library, Georgia State University

Fig. 5 Peachtree Street scene at the Frances Virginia Tea Room, corner of Ellis Street

Courtesy of Special Collections Department, Pullen Library, Georgia State University

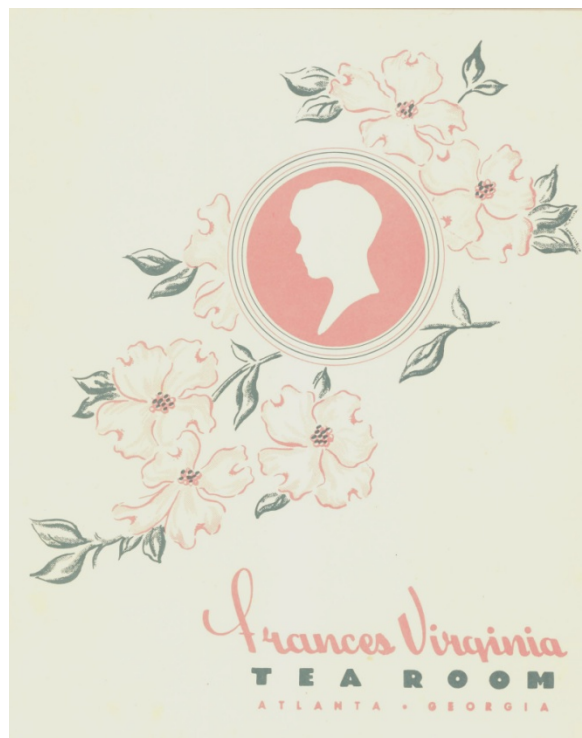


Fig. 6 Menu cover, Frances Virginia Tea Room

Coleman Cultural Materials Collection

Appetizers	
Shrimp Cocktail .50	V. 8 Cocktail or Tomato Juice .15
Chilled Fruit Cup .20	Cherry and Olives .25
Soups—Vegetable .25 and .35	Chicken with Rice .25 and .35
Oyster Stew .75	
Entrees	
<i>Minimum Service Per Person 35c (Except for Small Children)</i>	
* FRIED CHICKEN (One-Half) Rice and Gravy -	1.50
(Above Order Served for Two Persons—Including 1 we Additional Vegetables and 10c Beverage—2.00)	
CHICKEN a la KING on TOASTED NOODLES -	1.00
* BROILED SPANISH MACKEREL with LEMON -	.95
ROAST PORK with SPICED APPLE -	1.15
* SMOTHERED STEAK with RICE -	1.25
VEAL CROQUETTES with MUSHROOM SAUCE -	.85
Choice of Two Vegetables and 10 Beverage with Above Entree (Dinner Salad substituted for One Vegetable—3c extra)	
* DEVILED CRAB with TARTAR SAUCE -	.75
* BROILED CLUB STEAK -	2.00
Choice of Dinner Salad and .10 Beverage with Above Entree	
VEGETABLE PLATE—Choice of Three Vegetables and .10 Beverage.	.65
Bread and Butter -	
* Items Not Served in Reduced Portions	
Vegetables	
(a la Carte .20)	
Buttered Potatoes	Fresh Pole Beans
Baked Eggplant	Chopped Raw Vegetables
Fresh Spinach	Berbs with Orange Sauce
Dinner Salads	
(a la Carte .25)	
Combination Fruit	Tomato Aspic
Potato (Onion if Desired)	Head Lettuce
BREADS—10 (Except with Regular Meals)	Cottage Cheese
Rolls	Cornstarch
Muffins	Melba Toast
	Rye Kiosk
Salad Bowls and Plates	
CHICKEN SALAD -	.80; with Tomato Aspic .90
CHILLED SHRIMP, Hard Boiled Eggs, and Tomato. Choice of Thousand Island Dressing or Cocktail Sauce	1.00
BOWL of CRISP RAW VEGETABLES, Choice of Dressing with Eggs .55; with Shrimp .70	.40
FROZEN FRUIT SALAD with Date Nut Bread	.60
FRUIT ASPIC with COTTAGE CHEESE and Potato Chips	.55
Sandwiches	
<i>White, Whole Wheat or Rye (Topped 5c Extra)</i>	
Sliced Chicken -	.60
Deviled Egg -	.35
Baked Ham -	.50
Broiled Hamburger on Toasted Bun	.55
Hot Turkey and Egg Bread with Cranberry Sauce	.75
Desserts	
Fresh Coconut Cuiton Pie .15	Sherry Custard Pudding .15
Fresh Apple Pie .15; with Cheese .20	
Ice Cream Shortcake with Fudge Sauce .25	
Chocolate Fudge Sundae with Toasted Almonds .25	
Peppermint Ice Cream .15	Vanilla Ice Cream .15
Almond Toffee Ice Cream .15	Lime Sherbet .15
Chocolate Fudge Sauce 5c Extra	
Beverages	
Hot Tea .10	Iced Tea .10
Buttermilk .10	Coca-Cola .10
Sweet Milk .15	Gingerale .10
	Lemonade .10
	Festant Postum .10
HOURS of SERVICE — Lunch 11:30 to 2:30 — Dinner 5:00 to 7:30	
The Tea Room is Closed Saturday Evening and All Day Sunday	

Fig. 7 Menu, Frances Virginia Tea Room, Feb. 5, 1954
Coleman Cultural Materials Collection